KINGDOM OF THE PLANET OF THE APES
EPIC ACCESS TO THE NEXT CHAPTER OF THE SCI-FI SAGA

TOTAL FILM

CIVIL WAR
ALEX GARLAND AND KIRSTEN DUNST ON THEIR DIVIDED STATES THRILLER

JOHN KRASINSKI
SAY HELLO TO HIS IMAGINARY FRIENDS

JERRY SEINFELD
ON MAKING HIS DIRECTORIAL DEBUT POP

EXCLUSIVE!

'Stunt performers have been making actors into movie stars for over a century'
RYAN GOSLING

THE FALL GUY

'It's a love letter to making movies'
EMILY BLUNT

RYAN GOSLING AND EMILY BLUNT'S EXPLOSIVE ACTION ROMCOM TAKES BIG-SCREEN STUNTS TO THE NEXT LEVEL

+ **MELANIE LYNSKEY** BOY KILLS WORLD **JOSH O'CONNOR** HIT MAN **ANTHONY MACKIE** CALIGULA REVISITED

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Welcome to

TOTAL FILM
THE SMARTER MOVIE MAGAZINE

Stunts. While the word can be used to mean cheap attention-seeking antics, the stunts we're talking about don't get celebrated anywhere near enough. Awards season is over for another year, but we still haven't reached a point where any major academies are giving out gongs for stunts (though they did get a notable shout-out from our cover stars at this year's Oscars). In an industry that's increasingly dominated by pixels and digital trickery, little can come close to the old-school practical magic of real-life performers risking it all for breathtakingly tactile on-screen action.

So it was a pleasure this issue to talk to the team behind *The Fall Guy* – a noirish action romcom (?!) that puts stunts at the forefront in the story of a stunt-performer-turned-bounty-hunter. I also chatted to director-producer power couple David Leitch and Kelly McCormick, and stars Ryan Gosling and Emily Blunt, who have chemistry to burn.

Elsewhere in the issue, we're returning to the *Kingdom of the Planet of the Apes* via Kim Taylor-Foster's interviews with the entire team, while Jordan Farley's making (imaginary) friends with John Krasinski, who's discussing his new film. Jamie Graham gets the lowdown on Alex Garland's terrifying (near-) future vision in *Civil War*, and we're chuffed to also have in-depth interviews with Jerry Seinfeld and Melanie Lynskey: two long-time *TF* favourites with very different upcoming projects.

No one risked life and limb putting this issue together – although I had to wait until *dangerously* close to our print deadline to pin down Mr. Gosling, which was pretty pulse-pounding…

Enjoy the issue!

Matt

MATT MAYTUM, EDITOR
@MATTMAYTUM

CALL SHEET
THIS ISSUE'S EXTRAS

EDITOR-AT-LARGE (ACTING NEWS EDITOR)
JAMIE GRAHAM
@JAMIE_GRAHAM9

I particularly enjoyed chatting to Cailee Spaeny for the *Civil War* interviews. She's a proper film nerd and was cooing over the signed *Sid and Nancy* poster on my study wall.

REVIEWS EDITOR
MATTHEW LEYLAND
@TOTALFILM_MATTL

The *Dune: Part Two* premiere was great, but thank goodness I avoided an awkward red-carpet fashion clash, opting at the last minute for jeans/jumper over a bum-revealing robo-costume.

CONTRIBUTOR
KIM TAYLOR-FOSTER
@K_IMBOT

Owen Teague had just two books behind him on our Zoom call: *The Inheritance of Orchidea Divina* by Zoraida Córdova and *Faith, Hope and Carnage* by Nick Cave and Sean O'Hagan. A reader of great taste!

CONTRIBUTOR
ANN LEE
@_ANN_LEE

It was such a joy to speak to Melanie Lynskey. We had a good old natter about the Oscars, pre-ceremony, and she was 'crushed' that Greta Lee didn't get nominated.

CONTRIBUTING EDITOR
PAUL BRADSHAW
@P_BRADSHAW

Spent a day on a set visit in Cape Town where I had to help an A-lister wipe her own fake blood off a lovely leather sofa. More on that in a future issue...

DEPUTY EDITOR
JORDAN FARLEY
@JORDANFARLEY

Had a very enjoyable chat with John Krasinski for *IF*. After old-school signal issues, we ended up in a high-tech-looking group chat on WhatsApp. 'Oh my God. It feels like we're in *Gravity* or something now.'

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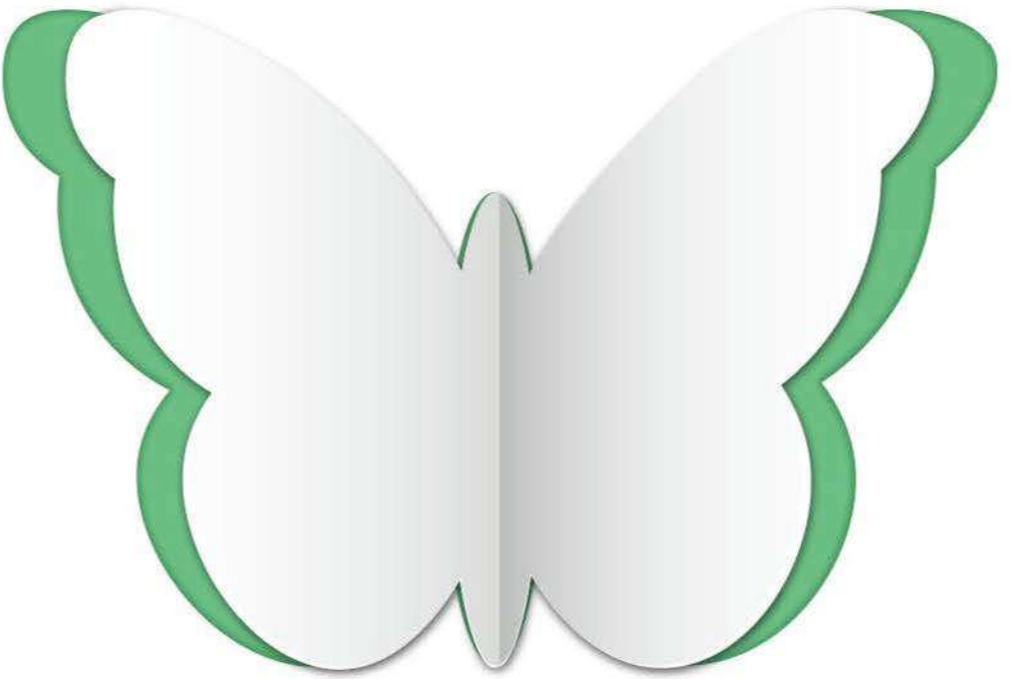

PAPER & BIODIVERSITY

Forests cover 31% of the world's total land area and contain most of the world's earthly biodiversity. To ensure the long-term health of forests, the European paper industry counts on sustainable forest management as a source for its main raw material.

Source: FAO and UNEP, The State of World's Forests, 2020

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TEASERS

SILENT BUT DEADLY

BOY KILLS WORLD Bill Skarsgård keeps it quiet for a coming-of-rage comedy actioner...

It's a revenge fantasy about a deaf assassin... It's a cocktail of anime action, Looney Tunes comedy and video-game violence... A dystopian satire and a psychological coming-of-age story... It's *Crank* in *The Hunger Games*. It's *The Raid* playing *Fortnite*... Luckily, director Moritz Mohr didn't have to pitch *Boy Kills World* to anyone – he just skipped straight to making the trailer himself.

'Basically me and Dawe [Szatarski] decided we needed to do something cool. Something fun. Something we could actually stand behind,' says Mohr, speaking from his home in Berlin, of his debut feature. 'Dawe is this great martial artist – at this point he'd already worked on [the] Kingsman [movies], in the stunt department – so we just made a trailer together. We shot it in four days, it took us almost a year to finish it, and since nobody got paid, it was super rough. But then I just took a gamble. I flew to LA, I slept on a friend's couch and I showed it to anyone who would watch it. A few days later I was sitting with Sam Raimi. Six years after that... here we are!'

It was a bumpy six years, the production bouncing between studios and twice halted by the pandemic. But by convincing Hollywood's original DIY expert to produce, Mohr could at least glory in Raimi's advice to pour all of his own obsessions into the final film. 'It was insane, because *Evil Dead II* is one of my favourite movies,' he grins. 'We talked a lot about what we loved. I love old kung-fu movies. I love Asian cinema. I play a lot of video games and I read a lot of manga. Anime is a big influence. But also shitty little Saturday-morning cartoons that I loved growing up. I knew I wanted to make a revenge movie with a deaf protagonist, but that was literally the one constant.'

Originally imagining someone younger for the lead, Mohr eventually landed on Bill Skarsgård – drawn to his silent menace as Pennywise in the It horror franchise. 'He's almost two metres tall, and that's not very boyish,' laughs Mohr. 'But at the same time, he's literally *perfect* for this. He has this childlike innocence. And he can fight. We did this little test with him – just some weapons training, some knife combinations – and I was like, "Holy fucking shit." He has these really long limbs and it just looked super fucking cool. It looked fresh.'

Orphaned as a child by a corrupt elite (including Sharlto Copley, Famke Janssen and *Downton Abbey*'s Michelle Dockery) who stage state executions on reality game shows, 'Boy' loses his hearing and his voice along with his family, before escaping into the jungle to learn fighting skills from a lone guru (*The Raid*'s Yayan Ruhian). What he doesn't lose, though, is his inner monologue. In the version screened to positive reviews at the Toronto International Film Festival, the voiceover was provided by Skarsgård himself. Since then, the decision has been made to opt for the other commentary that was recorded, the hook being that it's modelled on the last voice Boy heard – that of a 90s-style arcade beat-'em-up game.

'I particularly related, as someone who has been through all that, as a deaf assassin…' says H. Jon Benjamin, deadpanning with the same baritone he brings to *Bob's Burgers* and *Archer*. 'No, they sent me the trailer and it just looked *really* good. By the time I got the script I was already committed.'

Narrating Skarsgård's every move, Benjamin found a voice that was somewhere between *Mortal Kombat* and Bob Belcher; a character who slips in and out of fantasy to deal with his own trauma even as he's stabbing goons.

'The jokes are easy. But getting to the more emotional stuff was a little bit harder, trying to create a version of this person who feels kind of childlike,' says Benjamin. 'I think having the opportunity to do it a bunch of times helped. But I also had a total visceral reaction to some stuff, too. I remember seeing the scene where they drop an anvil on the guy's head and being like, "Jesus. Oh, God." I'm sure they have that take in the film, too.'

Anvils dropped on heads. Goats wielding sledgehammers. Dancing pineapples, killer cartoon pirates and one fight built around the frozen nose of a snowman. Coming up with funny, fresh action set pieces was a lot easier than actually pulling them off.

Director Moritz Mohr on set with Sharlto Copley, who plays the villainous Glen van der Koy

'You just… come up with shit. And then you go like, "Oh no, wait, they did that. We need to do something else,"' shrugs Mohr, laughing. 'There was originally this big scene where Boy rides through the city on a horse, and then the first trailer for *John Wick 3* came out… I'm madly in love with the action scenes in this film. It was all the rest that was super challenging: making sure we told the story properly.'

For the most part, that meant making a film where breathless martial-arts corridor fights felt at home alongside hallucinations of dead siblings. Where a running joke about macarons rides with violent political satire. Where a nod to Chaplin's *City Lights* comes showered in blood. 'It's weird if I say it, but I was really just crossing my fingers and hoping it would work,' laughs Mohr. 'We knew we were doing the splits on this film – hopefully the audience laughs, and hopefully, maybe, they'll even cry as well.'

PAUL BRADSHAW

'I'm madly in love with the action scenes in this film'
MORITZ MOHR

BOY KILLS WORLD OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 26 APRIL.

Yayan Ruhian as Boy's shamanic fight instructor

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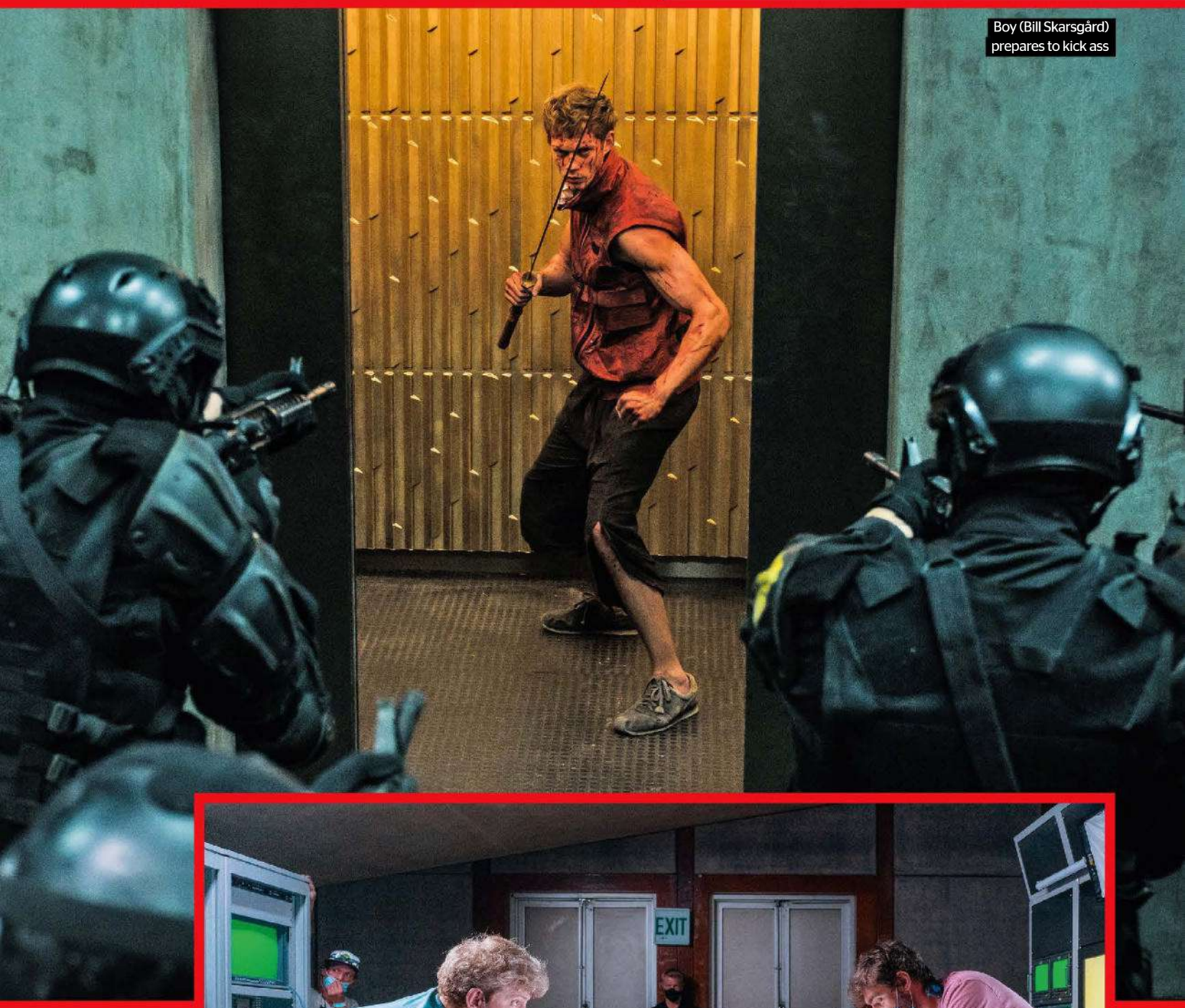

Boy (Bill Skarsgård) prepares to kick ass

Mohr and DoP Peter Matjasko

SIGNATURE ENTERTAINMENT

HOT RIGHT NOW

EBON MOSS-BACHRACH IS THE REAL THING.

It's just a bunch of screw-ups trying to make sandwiches,' Ebon Moss-Bachrach told *Vanity Fair* when the first season of Hulu's *The Bear* hit big. Pointing out that there are no superpowers at play in the kitchen, he said, 'For a show to catch on like this… it gives me hope.'

Cut to 19 months later, on 14 February 2024, and hearts beat fast across the globe as news broke that Moss-Bachrach will play Ben Grimm aka The Thing in Marvel's *The Fantastic Four*. The 47-year-old character actor best known for his roles in TV shows *Girls*, *Andor* and *The Bear* will star alongside Pedro Pascal (Reed Richards/Mr. Fantastic), Vanessa Kirby (Sue Storm/The Invisible Woman) and Joseph Quinn (Johnny Storm/The Human Torch) as the eponymous quartet. Yes, there will be superpowers, while Marvel's First Family at last making it home gives all of us hope.

Moss-Bachrach is a rock-solid choice. Born in Massachusetts to Jewish-American parents, he's the right cultural fit for Benjamin Jacob 'Ben' Grimm, who appeared in Stan Lee and Jack Kirby's original Fantastic Four comic-book series in 1961, and, it was later revealed in flashbacks, was born to Jewish parents on Manhattan's Lower East Side. But that's just the start. The Thing, with his orange, rock-like skin, is renowned for being temperamental, though his hard exterior masks something softer within. The same can be said for *Girls*' Desi Harperin, *Andor*'s Arvel Skeen and *The Bear*'s Richie Jerimovich, all tough and gruff but so much more. 'They're big fucking babies,' Moss-Bachrach said when it was put to him they have dirtbag tendencies. Self-centred, yes, but also vulnerable.

Still not convinced? Well don't forget that our man has previous in the MCU having played David Lieberman aka Micro in the first season of *The Punisher*. A former NSA analyst who's an expert hacker, Micro teams up with Jon Bernthal's Frank Castle and together they kill a whole load of mutual enemies. Micro didn't possess superpowers, of course, but let's call it a taste test.

JAMIE GRAHAM

THE FANTASTIC FOUR OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 25 JULY 2025.

GETTY

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Cuckoo is set at an Alpine resort where things are not as normal as they seem...

EXCLUSIVE

TICKING CLOCK

CUCKOO Tilman Singer's increasingly barmy horror defies sanity – and that's a good thing...

I don't think I'm that good making sane, normal stuff,' says German director Tilman Singer. 'I don't think I could really do it. And I don't think it would work really well.' For anyone who saw Singer's 'abstract' 2018 demonic debut *Luz*, that must surely be a relief. Likewise, his sophomore film *Cuckoo* doesn't disappoint on the batshit-crazy-o-meter – it's a reproductive chiller that channels the likes of David Cronenberg, J-horror and *Rosemary's Baby*.

Hunter Schafer plays American teenager Gretchen

Set in the German Alps, the story sees American 17-year-old Gretchen (Hunter Schafer) join her father (Marton Csokas), stepmum Beth (Jessica Henwick) and mute young stepsister Alma (Mila Lieu) at a resort owned by Herr König (Dan Stevens), her dad's new boss. Things get weirder from here on in, although ask Singer what his inspirations were and he taps into the emotions of the piece. 'It was a mix of fear, or some sort of anxiety and sadness. And then just things in the world that interest me.'

Among those was a BBC nature documentary presented by Sir David Attenborough he saw on the cuckoo. 'You know what they do, right? They drop their eggs, they kick one of the eggs out, and then the cuckoo bird hatches, but faster than the other chicks, and it pushes everything that touches its back out of the nest. And that's pretty sinister. But it's a natural process.' Soon, he was fascinated by this idea of 'brood parasitism'.

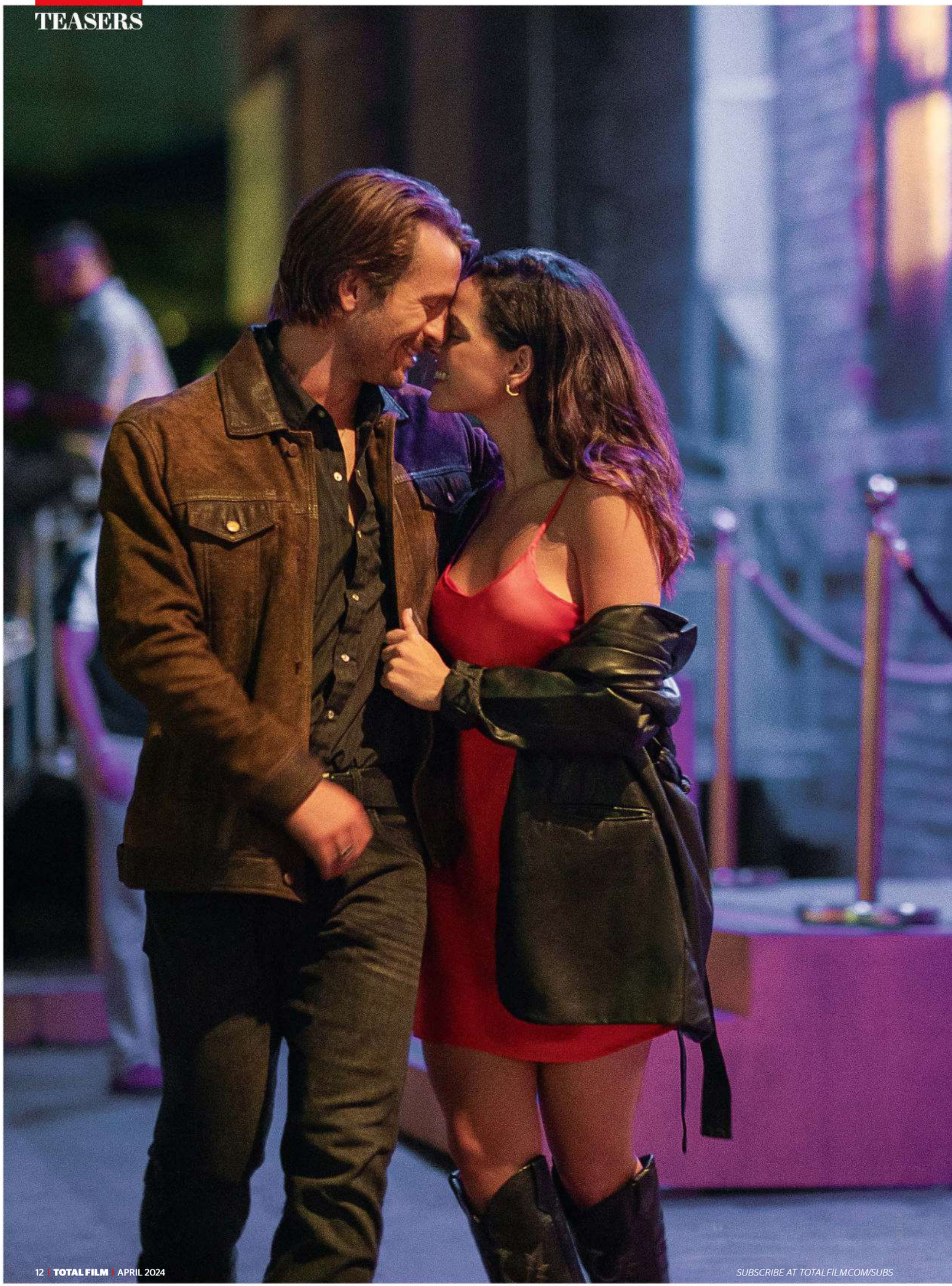
Somehow all of this lit a flame inside Singer, as he began to construct a bizarre tale involving impregnation – one that sees ex-*Downton Abbey* star Stevens go into full-on creepy mode as König. While the actor previously showed he could speak German in 2021's *I'm Your Man*, Singer was unaware until Stevens started conversing fluently during their first meeting. 'I almost fell off my chair, because I had no idea and I was immediately embarrassed for not having done proper research.' So what made him right for this oily character? 'Because of the sinister charm he has!'

'It was a mix of fear, or some sort of anxiety and sadness'
TILMAN SINGER

As for 25-year-old *Euphoria* star Schafer, this marks her first time fronting a movie. 'I knew she was perfect for the role,' says Singer, who arms his leading lady with a switchblade as she's forced to defend herself in increasingly bizarre circumstances (think Dr. Moreau-like experiments and plenty of weird bodily fluids). While some early reviews have seen writers scratching their scalps at the barmy absence of narrative logic in the film's latter half (it is, you might say, totally cuckoo), Singer promises that he isn't trying to be obscure deliberately. 'I do wish that a big audience enjoys the movie. I don't have an interest to make something utterly unapproachable or cryptic for the sake of art.' **JAMES MOTTRAM**

CUCKOO OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 17 MAY

UNIVERSAL PICTURES



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EXCLUSIVE

HOT SHOT

HIT MAN Richard Linklater's assassin is aiming to bring sexy back...

When it premiered at the Venice Film Festival last September, critics anointed Richard Linklater's latest film – a screwball sex-com with murder – as *the* contract-killer flick in a line-up that included David Fincher's *The Killer*, Woody Allen's *Coup de Chance* and Harmony Korine's *Aggro Dr1ft*.

'It's really satisfying when you make something you think is funny,' grins Linklater of the rapturous reception. Today, the naturally laid-back writer/director is especially relaxed as he lounges poolside at the Ausonia Hungaria Hotel on the Lido. 'They say these genres are dead but [the reaction is] wonderful. I think Hollywood can be years behind the times. Maybe our times should have more comedies.'

Something of a welcome throwback, *Hit Man* tracks the exploits of a mild-mannered New Orleans college lecturer, Gary (Glen Powell), who helps mic up undercover cops as they seek to entrap people who are looking to hire a killer to off their spouses/bosses/enemies. When a twist of fate sees Gary having to play the hit man himself in an undercover scenario, he discovers he likes his alter ego – and also the prospective crim, Madison (Adria Arjona), who wants rid of her abusive husband. A raunchy comedy with a body count ensues.

Based loosely on an article in *Texas Monthly* about a real-life police dupe, *Hit Man* was co-written and co-produced with Powell on spec during lockdown. The film hit differently after Powell had burst into the global consciousness with *Top Gun: Maverick*. If that charismatic support turn as Lt. Jake 'Hangman' Seresin felt like a calling card, this lead role, along with his winning antics alongside Sydney Sweeney in romcom *Anyone But You*, feels like a flex for stardom.

Linklater is not remotely surprised, having first worked with him on *Fast Food Nation,* when Powell was a teen, then again on *Everybody Wants Some!!*. 'We have so many stars based on nothing, you know?' he says. 'YouTube channel sensations… But anybody who's been around Glen or worked with him over the last 10 years, knows he's a star. Nothing he could do moving forward would surprise me.'

Powell's vie for internet-boyfriend status is helped by the searing chemistry he creates with Arjona. Linklater says he didn't do a chemistry read with the duo, but rather sent them out for drinks at 3pm to see if they'd gel.

'They sat down for an hour's meeting and four or five hours later, they were still sitting there talking,' he recalls. 'I was like, "OK, we're going to be good here!"' And as someone who's worked with romcom king Matthew McConaughey over the years, the director chuckles at the suggestion that there may be a handing over of the crown from one Texan to another. 'They've been around each other,' he says. 'I don't think it's anything official, but…'

JANE CROWTHER

'They say these genres are dead but [the reaction is] wonderful'
RICHARD LINKLATER

HIT MAN STREAMS ON NETFLIX FROM 7 JUNE.

THE LL WORD

Contributing editor **LEILA LATIF** has something to say...

Kumail Nanjiani in *Eternals*. The actor revealed he needed therapy after poor reviews

THIS MONTH...
PONDERING TRAUMATIC REVIEWS

Putting art out into the world takes courage, and in some ways, every film review should come with a disclaimer that regardless of quality, 'They made a film, and that's great!'

As critics, we seek to help people engage with cinema more meaningfully and to champion hidden gems, but I couldn't live with the guilt of encouraging people to fork out for a miserable time at the cinema. Even if everyone involved was genuinely trying their best.

Even so, it doesn't feel great to hear about Kumail Nanjiani's experience with the poor reviews of *Eternals* (2021), telling Michael Rosenbaum on his podcast: 'The reviews were bad and I was too aware of it. I was reading every review and checking too much.' His wife, Emily V. Gordon, who he co-wrote the glowingly reviewed *The Big Sick* with, is a trained therapist, and Nanjiani revealed that she encouraged him into counselling. 'Emily says that I do have trauma from it,' he said.

The idea of my own two-star review of *Eternals* (admittedly one where I said Nanjiani was the highlight) hurting him is horrible to consider, and a successful actor's bank account and access to therapy doesn't shield them from mental-health struggles. And yet, there I was a week after his podcast, reviewing another Hollywood movie, saying an actor was 'upstaged by a bad wig'.

In my defence (not that anyone could defend that wig), if we are going to be effusive with our praise – and I consider myself a generous film critic – we have to be able to call out when audiences should give a film a wide berth. We do this work because we love cinema; we think it can change lives and make us better, more empathetic people, and if people are disappointed time and time again by a trip to a multiplex, they will stop going and the whole industry will wither. But there are (self-imposed) rules around a bad review. For one thing, I wouldn't write anything sexist, racist or ableist. I approach every film in good faith and want it to be a masterpiece, and I don't hold a film's low budget against it.

But really bad reviews are fun to read and, admittedly, they're fun to write. The English language is filled with glorious ways to express disappointment and there's a level of creative freedom. I've seen bad reviews in the form of poems, personal essays on existential dread, and one that was partly unintelligible because the critic smashed their fist into the keyboard in fury.

They can become unbearably gleeful and smug, but being funny is one of the most significant skills a writer can have, and we want to make our readers smile. If you've had to sit through Jared Leto's performance in *Morbius*, then giggling at the jokes you come up with about his line delivery of 'the pretty little stinky pinky' seems like a just reward.

But more than anything, when I write, I think of what Dame Emma Thompson said when I watched her receive an award from the London Critics' Circle. She explained how the work critics do is valuable and our praise has helped her smaller projects reach audiences. We've helped shape her career by letting her know when she was on the right path. Still, she never reads the reviews, not even the glowing ones, in case there's one word that makes her feel self-conscious and less brave as a performer.

So please, Kumail, take Dame Emma's advice and don't read them whether they're bad or good. You still were courageous to put your creativity on show. You made a film, and that's great!

LEILA WILL BE BACK NEXT ISSUE. FOR FURTHER MUSINGS AND MISSIVES FOLLOW @LEILA_LATIF ON X/TWITTER.

ALAMY

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Deadly visitors: Pin-Up Girl and Scarecrow

EXCLUSIVE

SCARE BNB

THE STRANGERS: CHAPTER 1 Renny Harlin's reboot of the home-invasion classic opens the door to vast terrors...

Renny Harlin is explaining why home invasion is the scariest subgenre of horror. 'It's the ultimate fear,' says the director of *A Nightmare on Elm Street 4: The Dream Master* and *Exorcist: The Beginning*. 'It's one thing to go to exotic countries or to a ghost house or to an underground lair – you expect bad things to happen. But your home is supposed to be safe. When that's threatened...' He looks distressed. 'Especially when it seems aimless and senseless...'

Home-invasion movies go back to D.W. Griffith's *The Lonely Villa* in 1909, but the poster child of the subgenre in its modern form is Bryan Bertino's *The Strangers* (2008), in which a young couple are terrorised by three masked assailants. As an exercise in supremely crafted suspense, it's a cousin to Carpenter's *Halloween*. And while the belated second instalment, *The Strangers: Prey at Night* (2018), couldn't compare, the thought of a franchise reboot is intriguing. Especially as this is the first chapter of an epic trilogy.

'When [producer] Courtney Solomon sent the script to me, he said, "Do you remember *The Strangers*?"' Harlin recalls. 'I said, "It's one of my all-time favourite horror films." The script was 278 pages long! I'm like, "What's going on?" And then I realised that it's one giant story broken into three chapters, all set over a five-day period. I read the thing, and it was brilliant. It expands on that world and ends up answering some of the questions that we've all had for 15 years.'

'What I love about the movie is that there's nothing supernatural'
RENNY HARLIN

Froy Gutierrez and Madelaine Petsch star as the gang's targets

The expansion will come in the second and third chapters, with Harlin's experience directing such huge action movies as *Die Hard 2*, *Cliffhanger* and *The Long Kiss Goodnight* sure to come in handy. For now, though, viewers can expect a contained tale set largely in one location, as a young couple (Froy Gutierrez, Madelaine Petsch) on a cross-country drive break down in a small Oregon town and hire an Airbnb for the night. Who's that knocking at the door? Why, it's Scarecrow, Dollface and Pin-Up Girl, of course, the iconic antagonists of the previous two movies.

'I've stayed in Airbnbs, and always wondered: who else has the key; who else can come here?' ponders Harlin. It's a scary thought, but then what do you expect given his mum sat him down to *Psycho* when he was eight and *Rosemary's Baby* when he was nine? 'It was really fun to make the Airbnb a character in the movie. It's like the walls are breathing, and every crack and sound is a potential threat. But it's not a ghost house, by any means. What I love about the movie is that there's nothing supernatural. It's completely grounded in reality, and therefore incredibly frightening.' **JAMIE GRAHAM**

THE STRANGERS: CHAPTER 1 OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 17 MAY. CHAPTERS 2 AND 3 WILL OPEN LATER THIS YEAR.

LIONSGATE

SOUND BYTES

The month in dialogue and digits.

‘YES, BECAUSE YOU GET PAID A LOT OF MONEY. I HAVE TWO CHILDREN AND I SUPPORT MY MOTHER.’

KIRSTEN DUNST WOULD MAKE ANOTHER COMIC-BOOK MOVIE, FOR A VERY PRACTICAL REASON.

‘I’ve seen the new *Salem’s Lot* and it’s quite good. Old-school horror filmmaking: slow build, big payoff. Not sure why WB is holding it back... I just write the fking things.’**

STEPHEN KING BITES DOWN ON STUDIO POLITICS.

$73m

ADAM SANDLER’S EARNINGS IN 2023, PUTTING HIM TOP OF THE HOLLYWOOD TREE.

$310M

THE REPORTED COST OF **GLADIATOR 2**. IT WAS ORIGINALLY BUDGETED AT $165M.

‘THE BEST DIRECTED PIECE OF NOTHING I’VE EVER SEEN IN MY LIFE.’

BRET EASTON ELLIS HAS A DOUBLE-EDGED COMPLIMENT FOR DAVID FINCHER’S *THE KILLER*.

CAMERA READY

HONG KONG AUTEUR WONG KAR-WAI IS WORKING ON A NEW FILM, HIS FIRST FOR 10 YEARS.

GOOD THING

BAD THING

NAH NAH LAND

‘I HAVE NO ILLUSIONS...’ DAMIEN CHAZELLE MUSES THAT *BABYLON*’S FINANCIAL FAILURE MAY HAMPER FUTURE PROJECTS.

‘THEY HAVE THE WORM GOING STRAIGHT FAST. NO, THAT’S NOT HOW PHYSICS WORKS, THEY GOTTA CURL.’

ASTROPHYSICIST **NEIL DEGRASSE TYSON** IS NOT ON BOARD WITH THE WORM ACTION IN *DUNE: PART TWO*.

‘THERE WERE MEETINGS AND SITE MEETINGS, EMAILS AND TEXTS AND PHONE CALLS AND PEOPLE SWEATING. SOMEBODY WAS CRYING...’

JIMMY KIMMEL REVEALS IT WAS A HEADACHE TO GET THE NAKED JOHN CENA SKIT APPROVED FOR THE OSCARS.

GETTY

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Fran (Daisy Ridley) can't stop imagining her own death

EXCLUSIVE

BORED TO DEATH

SOMETIMES I THINK ABOUT DYING

Daisy Ridley dreams of her own demise in Rachel Lambert's poetic drama...

With *Sometimes I Think About Dying*, director Rachel Lambert sets out to accomplish a sensitive task: chronicling the lengthy bouts of melancholy that lead Fran (Daisy Ridley) to constantly daydream about her death. 'I really wanted the film to be not cynical, to be radically sincere,' said the director of navigating themes of suicide with her adaptation of the 2013 play *Killers*.

Dave Merheje plays Fran's co-worker Robert

Fran is an office clerk who lives a life as dull as cottage cheese, her favourite food. This tedium has the young woman staring at windows and contemplating her death, the morbid visions poetically brought to life by Lambert. 'I wanted [Fran's] visions to not be tormenting or punishing, but to propose a retreat and for her imagination to be a place that could give her a sense of escape – it could be comforting, even.'

She pauses and furrows her brow. 'It's my suspicion that when we are consumed with thoughts of dying, what we really are is tormented about living in a way that feels connected. When there is a distance between myself and the world around me, my imagination takes a lot of residence. This only exacerbates the problem with connection.'

According to the director, Ridley, who is of course best-known for her role as Rey in the Star Wars universe, needed no help to flip the switch into such a different character. 'You don't need to explain anything to Daisy when it comes to filmmaking. I'm thrilled people are seeing what a true talent and powerhouse she is, in this Old Hollywood style. She's an actress with innate instincts for understanding the camera, and a wonder of a performer.'

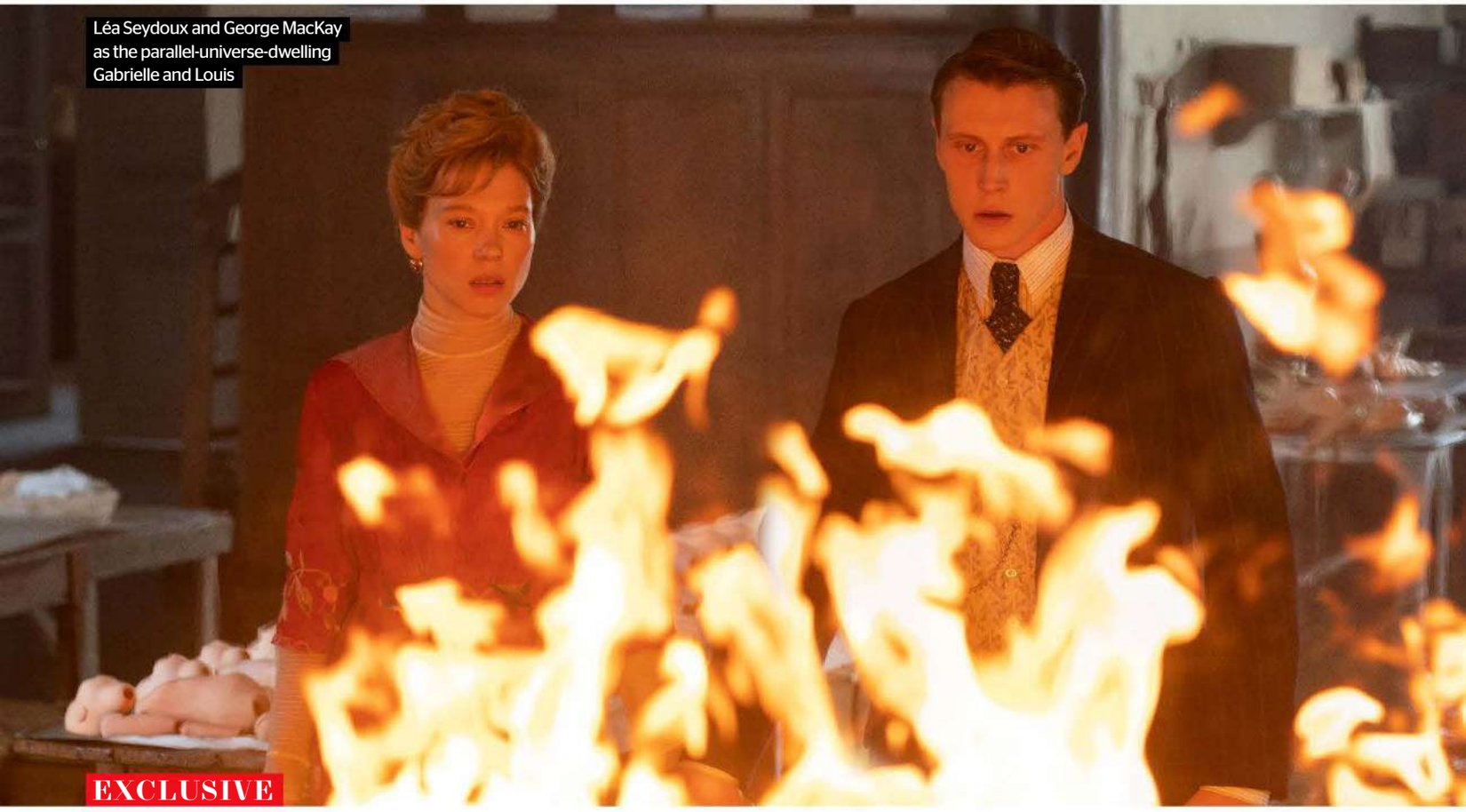
Ridley shares most screentime with Dave Merheje, who plays new office addition Robert. The movie-loving newcomer offered not only a fresh outlook on life to Fran, but the chance for Lambert to explore how one's love of cinema can act as a balm to loneliness. 'One of Robert's coping mechanisms is cinema. Perhaps he doesn't have as rich an inner life as Fran and he seeks that in films. We wanted to highlight the inner spaces we visit when we go to the movies, like when we are getting popcorn and imagine what it'll be like to go into this dark room with a person.'

'I really wanted the film to be radically sincere'
RACHEL LAMBERT

This tactile aspect is key for Lambert, who went to lengths to ensure she built walkable sets reflecting the nature of the characters. 'Exploring the five senses is really the difference between great writing and fine writing,' she says. 'I got the script for the film at the end of 2020, and during lockdown there was tension about the things we touched.' She smiles. 'By the time the project was ending, it became about celebrating it.' **RAFA SALES ROSS**

SOMETIMES I THINK ABOUT DYING IS IN CINEMAS 19 APRIL.

VERTIGO RELEASING



Léa Seydoux and George MacKay as the parallel-universe-dwelling Gabrielle and Louis

EXCLUSIVE

SOMETHING WILD

THE BEAST Bertrand Bonello's striking look at the past, present and future is a rare animal...

There were many starting points,' director Bertrand Bonello tells *Teasers* about his new film, *The Beast*. A heady mix of drama, romance, sci-fi and thriller, it stars Léa Seydoux and George MacKay, who play versions of the same characters, Gabrielle and Louis, across three time periods: La Belle Époque Paris just before the Great Flood of 1910; 2014 LA; and a future-set 2044.

Initially, Bonello (*Nocturama*) wanted to make a melodrama, 'which is something I've never done'. This desire brought him to Henry James' 1903 story *The Beast in the Jungle*, a 'heartbreaking, awful and beautiful' tale of a man increasingly paralysed by the idea that something terrible will attack him in the unknowable future. It rears its head in the 1910 segment, when Seydoux's celebrated pianist meets MacKay's admirer, who sharpens her fear of this bestial presence.

In the 2014 section, Gabrielle is an actor targeted by MacKay's disturbed 'incel' – a 30-year-old virginal vlogger. Inspired by the slasher movie *When a Stranger Calls*, Bonello also drew upon YouTube posts from real-life 2014 mass killer Elliot Rodger, who uploaded his misogynistic manifesto to the internet before taking seven lives. 'The way he says things, it's so simple. If I had written the stuff myself, I would have written something more crazy. And it's so much stronger, this simplicity.'

While Bonello wanted to explore the idea that 'fear and love are related', in the 2044 part, he looked to 'invent a concept about the loss of emotions and the price to pay'. Designing the future, 'I decided to have the world like today, but to take away many things,' he says. 'Make it very minimalistic. So there is no more internet, commercials, phones, screens, cars, sound... Everything's recreated in something very, very cold and minimalistic.'

'I like a film that gives me more questions than answers'
BERTRAND BONELLO

The film is set during three different eras

Bonello, who worked with Seydoux on fashion biopic *Saint Laurent*, wrote specifically for her. 'Of French actresses, she's the only one that could be in three periods. She's perfect in 1910 and today and tomorrow, because she has something timeless.' As for the role(s) of Louis, before MacKay, Bonello intended to cast the late French actor Gaspard Ulliel, another *Saint Laurent* alumni. 'He died a few weeks before the shoot. And for me, it was impossible to replace him with another French actor to avoid comparisons.'

The result is one of the more mysterious movies you'll see this year. 'Me as a spectator, I like a film that gives me more questions than answers,' Bonello says. 'This film is quite complex. But inside, it's much simpler. The feelings, the emotions, of the scenes are very basic. It's love, it's fear, it's tenderness, it's loneliness.'

JAMES MOTTRAM

THE BEAST OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 31 MAY.

VERTIGO RELEASING

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Enea Sala as Edgardo and Paolo Pierobon as Pope Pius IX

EXCLUSIVE

BODY AND SOUL

KIDNAPPED Marco Bellocchio's true-life period piece shames the Catholic Church once again...

Loosely based on the non-fiction book *Il Caso Mortara* by Daniele Scalise, *Kidnapped* tells a remarkable story: in 1858 Bologna, six-year-old Jewish boy Edgardo Mortara is taken by the Catholic Church from the bosom of his family, after officials are told he was baptised a Christian by the family maid. So begins a horrifying ordeal for his parents (played by Barbara Ronchi and Fausto Russo Alesi) as they fight the Church – led by Pope Pius IX – to retrieve their boy.

Barbara Ronchi stars as Edgardo's mother, Marianna

Veteran Italian director Marco Bellocchio (*Fists in the Pocket*, *The Traitor*) was raised Catholic in Piacenza, near Milan. When he discovered this unique piece of history in Scalise's book, he was shocked. 'Obviously I immediately sided with the family upon reading this book. So by virtue of my reaction of becoming aware of the story, but also my reaction against the viewpoint of a Catholic conservative writer [Vittorio Messori, whose writing on the case Bellocchio also read], I thought, "Well, there's a story – a great wrong has been done."'

Co-scripted by Bellocchio, Susanna Nicchiarelli and Edoardo Albinati, the film has performed well in Italy, with the Catholic Church even holding up its hands. 'There was great acceptance,' says the 84-year-old Bellocchio. 'They didn't even try to overlook it. And actually the Catholic Church admitted it was a mistake they made. They didn't try to defend either that policy or Pius IX. You have to bear in mind it's a completely different atmosphere at the moment, and also in the figure of the current Pope, he tries to push a more progressive agenda. There was no scandal, no pushback.'

One of *Kidnapped*'s major talking points is just how good Enea Sala is as the young Edgardo. 'He never even went inside the church before he filmed,' explains Bellocchio. 'But in his personal life, there was some suffering because his mother was ill in real life. [She] then died... [and] the child experienced that suffering and that sense of longing for the security of a mother. So that is the reason why we resonate with this performance... he latched on to this character's story of being separated from his much-loved mother.'

'I started shooting my film when I got wind of the fact that Spielberg had abandoned the idea'
MARCO BELLOCCHIO

Curiously, Bellocchio is not the first director to be intrigued by this story. Several years back, Steven Spielberg planned to film it, based on David I. Kertzer's book *The Kidnapping of Edgardo Mortara*. With Spielberg favourites – screenwriter Tony Kushner and actor Mark Rylance – lined up, it was only the right actor to play Edgardo that eluded him. 'I started shooting my film when I got wind of the fact that Spielberg had abandoned the idea,' shrugs Bellocchio. 'After I shot the film, I wrote a letter to Spielberg, inviting him to see the film.' So did he turn up? 'I never received any reply.' Oh well... **JAMES MOTTRAM**

KIDNAPPED OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 26 APRIL.

COURTESY OF FILM

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EXCLUSIVE

Louisa Harland as outlaw Nell Jackson; (below) Frank Dillane as Charles Devereux

MIGHT & MAGIC

RENEGADE NELL Sally Wainwright follows up *Happy Valley* with an earthy period fantasy...

I'm a really big fan of left-turns and unusual combinations,' says Ben Taylor (*Sex Education*, *Catastrophe*), who directs the stage-setting opening episodes of Disney+ fantasy series *Renegade Nell*. 'For me, this was the ultimate writer version: "Imagine Sally Wainwright doing a violent, period VFX romp."'

Set in early 18th-century England, *Renegade Nell*'s eponymous outlaw (Louisa Harland, *Derry Girls)* turns to highway robbery after being framed for the murder of a local landowner. Nell also happens to be the strongest woman in the world, imbued with a *Hulk*-like left hook by a kindly demon sprite called Billy Blind (Nick Mohammed), and the only person who can stop a magical conspiracy targeting Queen Anne.

Describing Nell as a 'new-feel, new-look Disney hero', Taylor says, in less family-friendly terms, that, 'When shit goes down, it's all about how ready she is to handle herself,' with physics-defying action a major component of the series. 'We open with this pre-title scene where she gets into a massive fight,' Taylor explains. 'It was kung-fu fighting. It was wire work. A lot of character and comedy was put into the choreography.'

Written by celebrated TV scribe Sally Wainwright some 15 years ago, *Renegade Nell* is a 'heady mix of folklore and fantasy' according to Taylor. And though it 'leans into horror as well', with all manner of gnarly creatures conjured to hunt Nell, 'the fun of it offsets the danger and the violence,' Taylor claims.

Shot largely on location in the countryside around London, the dirt under the fingernails approach contrasts with the show's biggest, strangest swing. 'Billy Blind is the most magical of these creatures,' Taylor details. 'He flies; he disappears; he shrinks; he grows; he leaves a vapour trail of sparks and energy behind him. But we were very keen that he didn't descend into Tinkerbell, mad, Disney stuff.' It's a, kind of, magic. **JORDAN FARLEY**

RENEGADE NELL STREAMS ON DISNEY+ FROM 29 MARCH.

DISNEY, GETTY

Q&A

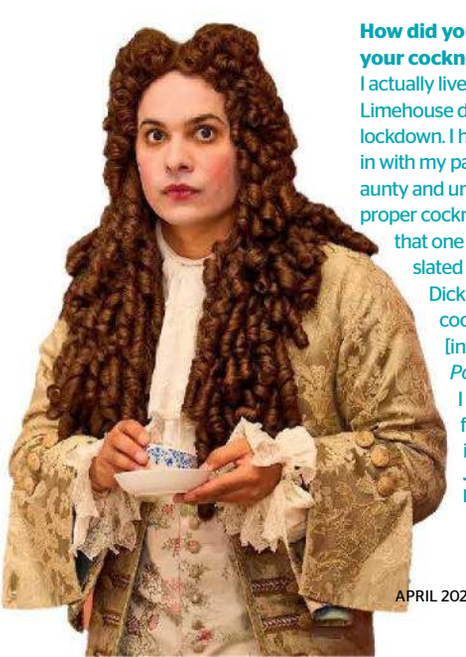
Louisa Harland

Were you looking for a left-turn after *Derry Girls*?
I worried that I would be seen as that character for the rest of my career. So I was definitely looking to do something different. And Nell's *different*.

Was fight training new to you?
I've never been into a gym in my life! I had three months' training, and it was really intense. I would have around four hours in the morning of boxing and fight training. Then I would go off to Milton Keynes to learn how to ride a horse for the rest of the afternoon and, my god, I needed it.

Were you surprised this came from Sally Wainwright's desk?
The combination of Sally Wainwright and Disney is brilliant. It's still very textbook Sally. It's centred around class. It's centred around gender dynamics. It does actually feel quite 'Sally' when you know.

How did you perfect your cockney accent?
I actually lived in Limehouse during lockdown. I had to move in with my partner and his aunty and uncle, who are proper cockneys. Given that one of the most slated accents is Dick Van Dyke's cockney accent [in *Mary Poppins*], I knew I had to really find truth in it. [laughs] **JORDAN FARLEY**

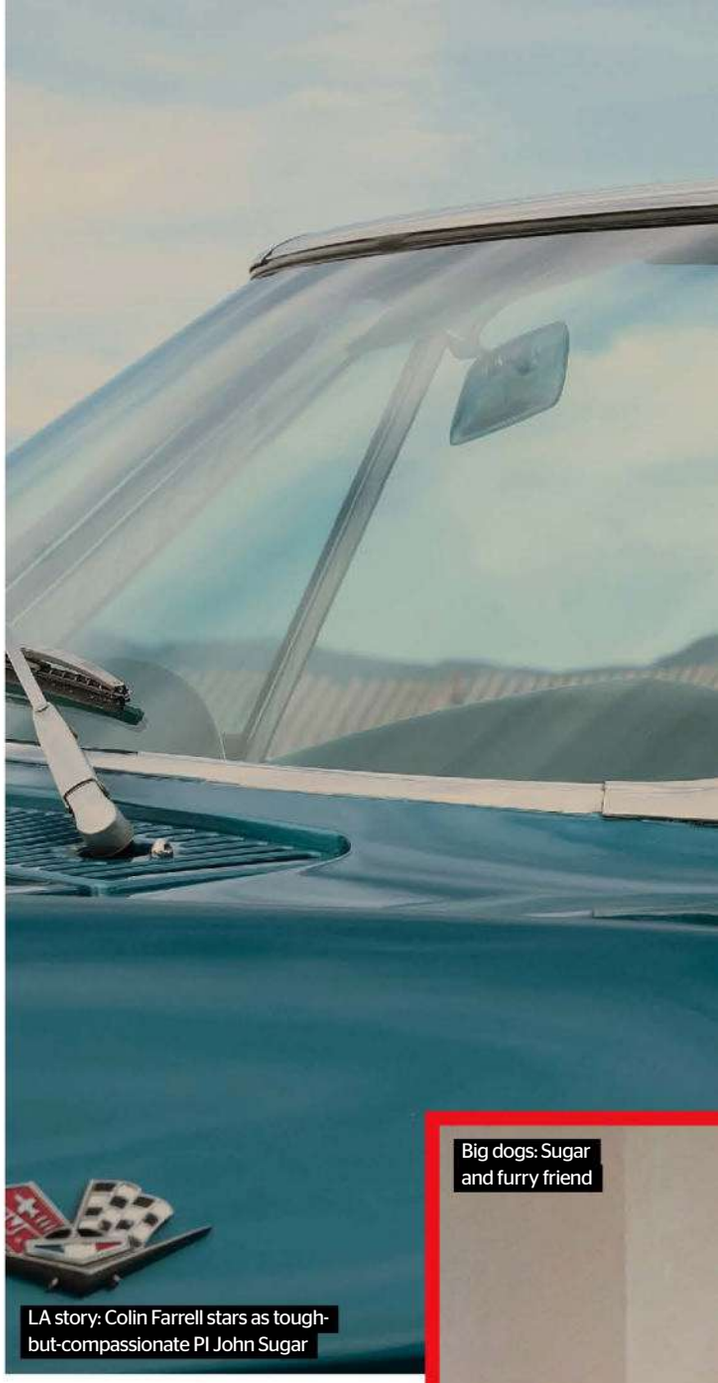


EXCLUSIVE

CITIZEN CANE

SUGAR Elegant and electrifying, this modern-day LA noir starring Colin Farrell blends the new with the old to hit the sweet spot...

Your next must-see show, *Sugar* sees PI John Sugar (Colin Farrell) criss-cross LA in his Corvette convertible to unravel the missing-person case of Olivia Siegel (Sydney Chandler), granddaughter of Hollywood producer Jonathan Siegel (James Cromwell). Five of the eight episodes are directed with sophistication and brio by Fernando Meirelles (*City of God*, *The Constant Gardener*), who leans in to the show's roots in the film noirs of the 40s and 50s even as he subverts tropes to create a fresh, modern take. *Teasers* tracks down Meirelles and executive producers Simon Kinberg and Audrey Chon to get the sweet and lowdown...



LA story: Colin Farrell stars as tough-but-compassionate PI John Sugar

Big dogs: Sugar and furry friend

A love of classic film noir flows through every frame of *Sugar*. Is it a genre you adore?
Audrey Chon: I'm a fan!
Fernando Meirelles: Actually, no. I really hadn't seen many films. When they invited me to the series, I thought it was a good opportunity to know and understand the genre. So I watched lots of films.
Simon Kinberg: It's a genre I've loved forever. I took a film-noir class when I was in college. The attitude and swagger of those old movies, you know?

Film clips from classic noirs are elegantly spliced into the action. How did you go about finding them?
FM: This was maybe my best contribution – to include all those clips. My editor, Fernando Stutz, watches a lot, and he takes notes. But I had lots of clips also fresh in my mind because I'd just watched, like, 50 films! It was great, trying to find scenes and match the story or the emotion that we were looking for.

You introduce fresh flavours. John Sugar is brutish when he needs to be, but he also has tremendous compassion...
SK: Yeah, absolutely. I think [the show] feels modern in so many ways, starting with the character. He's modelled on those Humphrey Bogart-style detectives, but there's this whole other side of him that is kind and compassionate and chivalrous. Fragile. It's almost like he's hard-boiled with a runny inside.

Why did you think of Colin Farrell for the role of John Sugar?
AC: Colin can transform into any character, and he has such a fantastic leading-man quality. But he's also incredibly kind and thoughtful, and that's pretty much written into Sugar as a character. When we watched him perform on set, the lines were blurring between Colin Farrell and John Sugar in a very interesting way.
FM: When I was invited [to direct], I said, 'Well, Colin Farrell, I'm not sure I want to work with him.' Because the image I had of him was that wild boy that he was a long time ago. But then I spoke to him for one hour to see if I was going to join or not, and he's such a wonderful guy – lovely and kind. And so collaborative.

He now has a calmness and wisdom that fits John Sugar...
FM: Yeah. Sugar is very gentle and kind, and Colin is like that. He gets to set and talks to everybody. He's always available.
SK: Just being around him, and hearing the way he talks about people, and about characters, it's with the compassion and empathy that comes from experience. As we get older, we go through more profound kinds of suffering, and through more profound kinds of joy, too, as a parent. I think he brings all of that to what he's been doing in cinema.

Did you enjoying shooting all over Los Angeles? The driving scenes are terrific!
FM: Very much. All of this driving wasn't in the script, but watching all these films, you see a lot of cars parking in front of houses. I never use establishing shots in my films or TV, but there are a lot in film noir. So I tried to replicate this. It's to show LA, which is a big part of the story.

It's a different LA from the one we usually see. Is that because you're Brazilian, viewing the city with fresh eyes?
FM: I think it helps. You look and try to understand it, and then give your take on it.
AC: Fernando and his long-time collaborator and DoP, César Charlone,

'Colin can transform into any character, and he has such a fantastic leading-man quality'
AUDREY CHON

APPLE TV+

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The cast includes Kirby as mysterious handler Ruby

have this run-and-gun style. They're not even lighting many of the scenes. They show up, the crew do a run-through, and then Fernando will say, 'All right, let's shoot.' Our crew weren't used to filmmakers like that!

The female characters played by Kirby, Amy Ryan and Sydney Chandler are great, too. Film noir's always given us fabulous women…

FM: Yeah. Kirby, I think, has a great role. The way she's bossy at the same time as kind. I like her performance, and I like her character.

SK: As macho as [classic noir] is, it also has these incredibly strong female characters, and incredible strong actresses playing those characters. We have Amy and Kirby and these really strong actresses who are multidimensional performers playing complex characters. It's not just a bunch of guys running around in suits with guns.

AC: You can see the influence of female character archetypes that existed in film noir. However, it's very much a modern take on that.

There's so much more you could explore. Will there be a Season 2?

FM: I'd love to come back, working with Colin again, and the production and the producers.

AC: Yes, there's so much more you can explore – not only Colin's character, but his relationship with Los Angeles.

SK: We loved making this show. We loved the character of Sugar. We feel like he's a character that you could follow into many other mysteries and stories. **JAMIE GRAHAM**

SUGAR STREAMS ON APPLE TV+ FROM 5 APRIL.

Zafreen Zairizal as Zaffan, who undergoes a strange physical transformation on hitting puberty

EXCLUSIVE

CAT PERSON

TIGER STRIPES Puberty is a monster in this Cannes-winning body horror...

When is the first time we learn about shame and judgement?' Amanda Nell Eu asks *Teasers*. 'Your transformation from child to adult is a tough process.' Think about puberty as a metaphor in horror and a few movies will spring to mind. *Carrie*, of course. *Ginger Snaps*. *Teen Wolf*, if you're easily spooked.

Growing up on genre cinema, Malaysian filmmaker Nell Eu is well aware of the subject's usually tragic form in scary movies. Knowing what's already been done before may explain why her debut feature, *Tiger Stripes*, feels so fresh as a more light-hearted spin on teenage transformation: 'It's got a lot of my personality, which I guess is pink, punk, loud, fun and strange. I always joke that some people have oil paintings as films, while mine are made with crayons.'

Winner of the 2023 Grand Prize in the Critics' Week section of Cannes, *Tiger Stripes* sees rebellious pre-teen Zaffan (Zafreen Zairizal) become ostracised by her classmates when she's the first in her all-girls Muslim school's peer group to get periods. 'It was delving back into what it was like being a girl,' says Nell Eu of the film's character dynamics. 'And what it's like to have friends you love, fear, hate and respect at the same time.'

'It's got a lot of my personality'
AMANDA NELL EU

Seemingly encouraged by the inhuman labels thrown her way, Zaffan also undergoes a metamorphosis into a weretiger. For this, Nell Eu employs unusual practical effects over anything broaching realism. 'Even stuff where she jumps up a tree, we literally pulled her up the tree, then sped it up,' she says. 'In terms of specific influences, there was the Japanese horror *House*. Bunch of girls, cats, blood: it ticks every box that I love!" **JOSH SLATER-WILLIAMS**

TIGER STRIPES IS IN CINEMAS ON 3 MAY.

GETTY, MODERN FILMS

SHORT CUTS The latest happenings in movieland...

BAT OH-MAN

Last year's Writers Guild strike means dark days in Gotham. Warner Bros. has announced that Matt Reeves' *The Batman Part II*, starring Robert Pattinson as the Caped Crusader, has been put back to October 2026.

SCREAM QUEEN

Sidney Prescott is back! *Scream 7* will star Neve Campbell (left) and be directed by original scribe Kevin Williamson. Campbell refused *Scream VI*, but now says, 'I've been asked, in the most respectful way, to bring Sidney back...'

ARI GRAND

Ari Aster's (right) next film is *Eddington*, described by production company A24 as 'a contemporary western'. It features the stacked cast of Joaquin Phoenix, Emma Stone, Pedro Pascal and Austin Butler, and will be lensed by double Oscar-nominee Darius Khondji.

SIZE MATTERS

Warner Bros. has labelled PTA's 10th feature 'An Untitled Paul Thomas Anderson Event Film' and set a release date of August 2025 – in IMAX theatres. It stars Leonardo DiCaprio, Sean Penn, Alana Haim and Regina Hall.

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BETWEEN TAKES

JOSH O'CONNOR

THE *CHALLENGERS* STAR ON COFFEE, CHIPS AND ZENDAYA'S ONESIE...

What's the first thing you do when you get to set?
Just a big mug of coffee. I'm filming in New York right now and I'm on decaf because coffees here give me the shakes. I don't know if there's any science to back this up, but I feel like I still get a kick when I have a decaf.

What do you always take to set?
I'll have my scrapbooks, which is what I do for prep for a film – notes, drawings and ideas. My little book is always with me. There's lots of stuff about backstory. In this case, what [my character] Patrick was like before, and family background stuff that isn't in the movie.

Hot lunch or cold lunch?
Right now, I'm eating very low-calorie nutritious things. I'm not trying to lose weight, and normally I'd just have lasagne or chips or whatever is going on, but I've been told that I'll get much more energy eating rocket and tuna. It's delicious, but so far, it's not working. I'm exhausted.

Do you ever sleep on set?
At lunchtime, I pretty much always sleep. I eat my food walking from set just to maximise sleep. My rule is no more than 40 minutes any more, or I feel like I've cheated the people who employ me and feel a bit groggy.

What's been your best on-set experience?
Challengers was a beautiful experience. [My co-stars] Mike [Faist] and Zendaya were just a dream, and Luca [Guadagnino, director] is phenomenal. Just before *Challengers*, I made this film, *La Chimera* [see page 28], and I'd say that was probably the best, most important experience in my career so far.

Have you ever stolen anything from set as a memento?
I attempted to steal something from *The Crown*. There was this paperweight with Prince Charles' face on it, and it was kind of tacky, but I loved it. My plan was to get caught but then be given it as a wrap gift. But they never did, so now I wish I had just stolen it.

'I DON'T KNOW IF THERE'S ANY SCIENCE TO BACK THIS UP, BUT I FEEL LIKE I STILL GET A KICK WHEN I HAVE A DECAF COFFEE'

With Zendaya in the upcoming *Challengers*

ALAMY; GETTY

Did you learn any useful skills on the set of *Challengers*?
I'm a lot better at tennis, but a lot better than what I was is still not very good. The best and worst part of the job is you have two months learning a skill and then you're on to your next job. It's like jack of all trades, master of none. I was shooting a scene playing piano the other day and someone said, 'What's your favourite piece to play?' I was like, 'This is it... This is all I can play.'

Do you maintain friendships with the cast and crew?
You pick up friends as you go through, and sometimes you reconnect. Someone like Jessie Buckley has been my friend since drama school and I might not speak to Jessie for five months, and then we'll pick it up where we left off. Actors just get used to that. This year I'm not going to be home or see my family for most of the year.

Have you given or received any memorable end-of-shoot gifts?
Mike Faist and I thought it would be really funny, and I don't know why – there must have been some context – to get an American flag onesie pyjama set for Zendaya from Amazon for like $8. And we wrapped it up, and I think her assistant Darnell knew what we were giving her and very cleverly said, 'Why don't you all open the gifts in the cars, like away from each other, because it's awkward opening gifts in front of each other?' Thank God, Darnell saved our life because Mike and I opened up these thoughtful, incredibly generous, beautiful gifts from Zendaya. We just sat in the cars the whole way back, dreading the thought of Zendaya opening her $8 onesie. Shame on us!

LEILA LATIF

CHALLENGERS OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 26 APRIL.

NEXT BIG THING

SAURA LIGHTFOOT-LEON IS RIDING A TORNADO.

My heart stopped many times,' says Saura Lightfoot-Leon, thinking back to her Venice Film Festival bow in Luna Carmoon's startling *Hoard* last year. Born in 1998, and raised in The Hague in the Netherlands, the Spanish-English actor deservedly got a 'special mention' from the jury for her stunning performance as Maria, an unruly fostered teenager dealing with the twin volcanic emotions of love and grief…

How was it working with *Stranger Things*' Joseph Quinn on such an intimate film?

He's a wonderful person, wonderful actor. And we have this beautiful friendship… because we did this mad thing together. We're both living in London. So having someone to support you and to be a helping hand, not only as an actor but as a friend, is really, really big. Especially in this industry.

Hoard is a strange film, in the best way. Did it feel strange when you were making it?

When we were filming it, it felt like there were little crumbs… like Hansel and Gretel. Every time I took a little crumb… part of the feast became alive. And for Maria, I think her journey… She's not aware. That's the whole beauty and the magic of it, and the madness of it. Because madness is not something you're aware of as it's happening. For her, I saw it as a spiral, a tornado that she enters.

You grew up in The Hague. How was that?

Sometimes sleepy, very safe. Green. Lots of people from different walks of life. Lots of cycling. It's the Dutch culture, which is very hands-on, straightforward, no bullshit. It's what it is. And that's what I grew up in. I also grew up in rehearsal rooms, because of my parents, who were choreographers and dancers. So I travelled a lot with them.

You're starring in upcoming period TV drama *American Primeval*. What can you say about it?

That's another beast of a project! We had one month of cowboy camp. For someone who's never ridden a horse in her life before, it was amazing!

JAMES MOTTRAM

HOARD OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 10 MAY. AMERICAN PRIMEVAL STREAMS ON NETFLIX LATER IN 2024.

PHOTOGRAPHER: MILLY ADOPE. MAKE-UP: EMILY WOOD

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Powell and Pressburger's *The Red Shoes*. A new doc on the filmmaking duo is hosted by Martin Scorsese (below)

EXCLUSIVE

PAIR OF ACES

MADE IN ENGLAND David Hinton's Powell and Pressburger doc calls on Martin Scorsese...

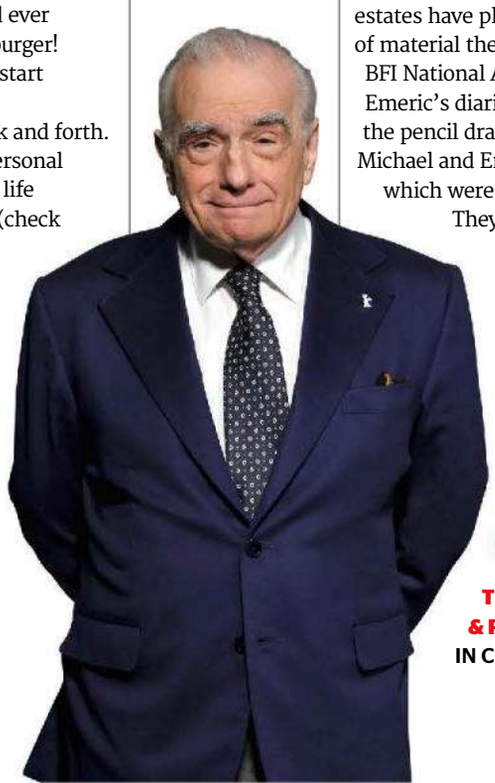
'Audacity and ambivalence' are the two words that documentarian David Hinton uses to sum up the films of Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger. 'It's the audacity of the ideas, the ambivalence of the characters; there's always this complexity.'

In 1986, Hinton directed an episode of *The South Bank Show* that explored Powell and his string of idiosyncratic, rapturous, boundary-pushing classics: *A Canterbury Tale*, *A Matter of Life and Death*, *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp*, *Black Narcissus*, *The Red Shoes*... The visionary director, then in his 80s and ostracised from the film industry since 1960 serial killer movie *Peeping Tom* caused outrage, hit it off with the 30-something Hinton. The two remained friends until Powell's death in 1990. Little wonder, then, that Powell's wife, Thelma Schoonmaker – the editor of every Martin Scorsese picture since *Raging Bull* – suggested Hinton to helm feature-length Powell and Pressburger doc *Made in England*.

Naturally, Scorsese hosts it. 'Over the years, Scorsese has said a huge amount about Powell and Pressburger,' says Hinton, who also met Scorsese, through Powell, in the 80s. 'Marty's got this full-time archivist, Marianne Bower. So I got her to send me everything that Scorsese had ever said about Powell and Pressburger! And from that, I was able to start shaping the film.'

There was a constant back and forth. Scorsese adopted a deeply personal approach, attaching his own life and movies to P&P's output (check out the startling comparison between *The Red Shoes*' impresario Boris Lermontov and *Taxi Driver*'s Travis Bickle) as he discusses how the films have changed for him as he's grown older. Scorsese would 'worry about a single word in the middle of a sentence', says Hinton, and then recorded his script in lockdown, so that *Made in England* could be built around it. When Scorsese finally sat down to record his commentary to camera, it was done in two days.

'I was able to start shaping the film around Scorsese's quotes'
DAVID HINTON

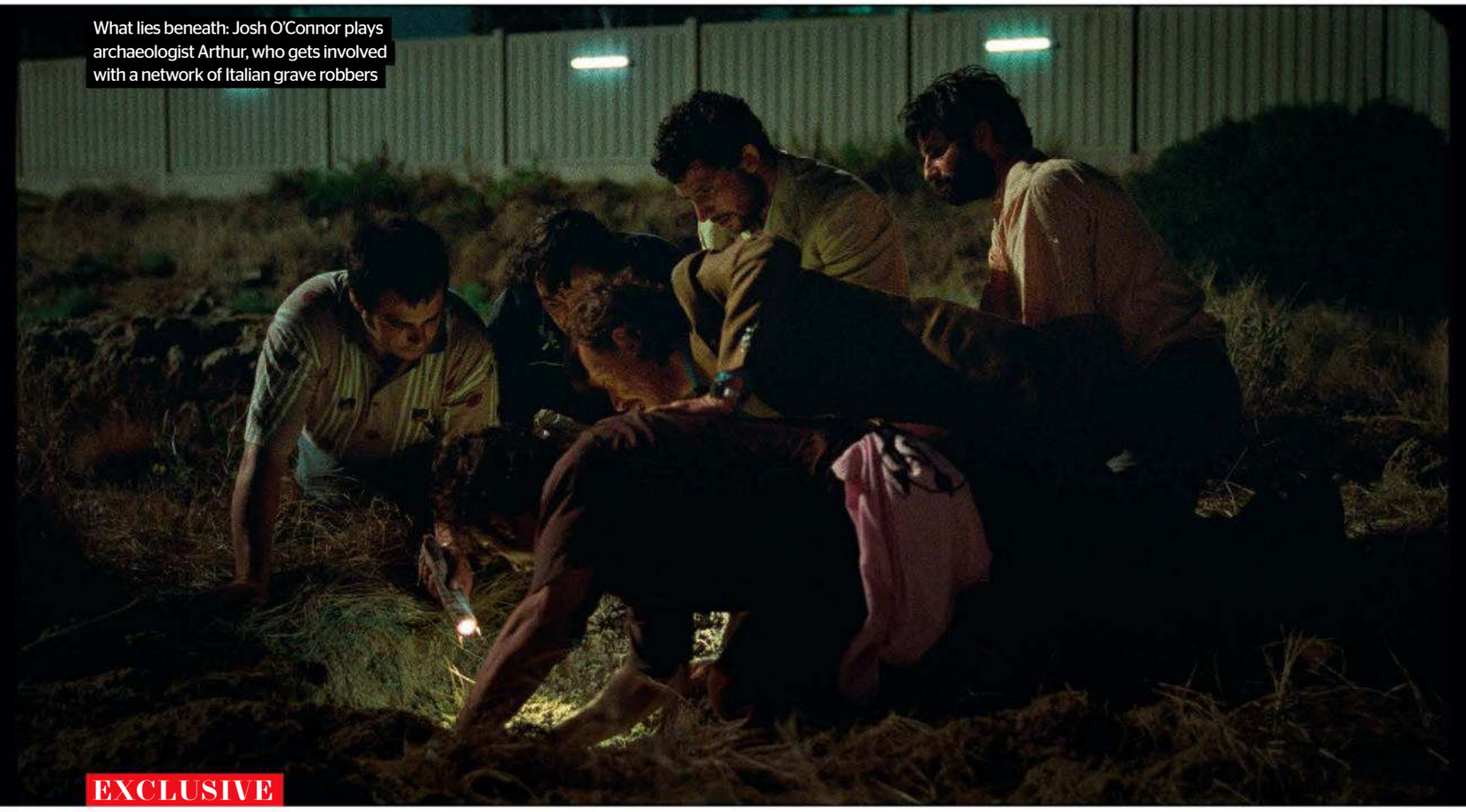


It is, of course, a joy: passionate, insightful, affecting. And equally glorious is the archive material, peppered with previously hidden treasures such as Pressburger and Powell on set of *A Matter of Life and Death*, and giving a rare joint interview for Canadian TV. 'Obviously, one great resource was the BFI because both the estates have placed a huge amount of material there,' says Hinton. 'The BFI National Archive has all of Emeric's diaries, his old notebooks, the pencil drafts of the scripts. And Michael and Emeric's home movies, which were restored last year. They're a revelation.'

To quote a character in *The Red Shoes*, who's asked to define ballet: 'One might call it the poetry of motion.' The same can be said of P&P's movies, and of this extraordinary doc that does them justice. **JAMIE GRAHAM**

MADE IN ENGLAND: THE FILMS OF POWELL & PRESSBURGER OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 10 MAY.

ALAMY, GETTY



What lies beneath: Josh O'Connor plays archaeologist Arthur, who gets involved with a network of Italian grave robbers

EXCLUSIVE

TOMB RAIDERS

LA CHIMERA Alice Rohrwacher dives into the treasure trove of Italy's past for her latest curio...

When Italian director Alice Rohrwacher (*Happy as Lazzaro*, *The Wonders*) was growing up in Umbria, she was surrounded by antiquities – and those that robbed them. 'At night, men used to dig up the graves to find the treasures that were buried inside,' she recalls. 'They had been sacred for 2,000 to 3,000 years. But now they were taking out the objects.'

It got her thinking about what might drive someone to tamper with the 'sacred meaning [of] something that belongs to the past', resulting in her new film, *La Chimera*. In it, British actor Josh O'Connor plays Arthur, a young archeologist in 1980s Tuscany who falls in with a group of vagabonds filching Etruscan artefacts from graves before selling them on. As oblique as this sounds, Rohrwacher notes how this was a common practice.

'It used to be much bigger than drug trafficking in the 80s and 90s,' she says. 'It was flourishing in Italy. Now the law has been changed, and therefore it's no longer as practised as it was in the golden age, but in many countries – wherever there were strong past civilisations and architectural artefacts buried – this is an illegal practice that [regularly occurred].'

For the record, Rohrwacher is 'obviously against the illegal aspect of this trafficking' and the film is not a celebration of such larceny. 'Mine is really a meditation on our relationship with the past, with the people who we've lost, with death, with the afterlife, with the dead themselves.

'The film is a meditation on our relationship with death, with the afterlife...'
ALICE ROHRWACHER

Arthur and his team plan their next dig

And it's not a coincidence that I wrote the film during the pandemic, when very abruptly the collective idea of death entered our lives.'

Yet it would be wrong to think of *La Chimera* as morbid, boasting as it does the same Fellini-esque feel of her earlier works, especially 2018's *Happy as Lazzaro* – the film that prompted O'Connor to write Rohrwacher an admiring fan letter. Initially, Rohrwacher wasn't thinking of him for Arthur, who was written as a 60-year-old. 'When I met him, I realised that he had a grace and melancholy and a bottled-up rage, which prompted me into changing the character.'

She also got to work with the 'extraordinary' Isabella Rossellini, who plays the aristocratic mother to Arthur's lost love. Curiously, they even found a picture of Rossellini, as a baby, on the cover of a newspaper, part of a pile that the production designer brought in to decorate the set with. 'She said, "Oh look, I was already on the cover of journals when I was a child!" The idea of her being on the front pages since she was born... and still being so humble, is just completely unique. She's very rooted in the ground.' Just like all those antiquities.

JAMES MOTTRAM

LA CHIMERA OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 10 MAY.

COURTESY OF CURZON FILM

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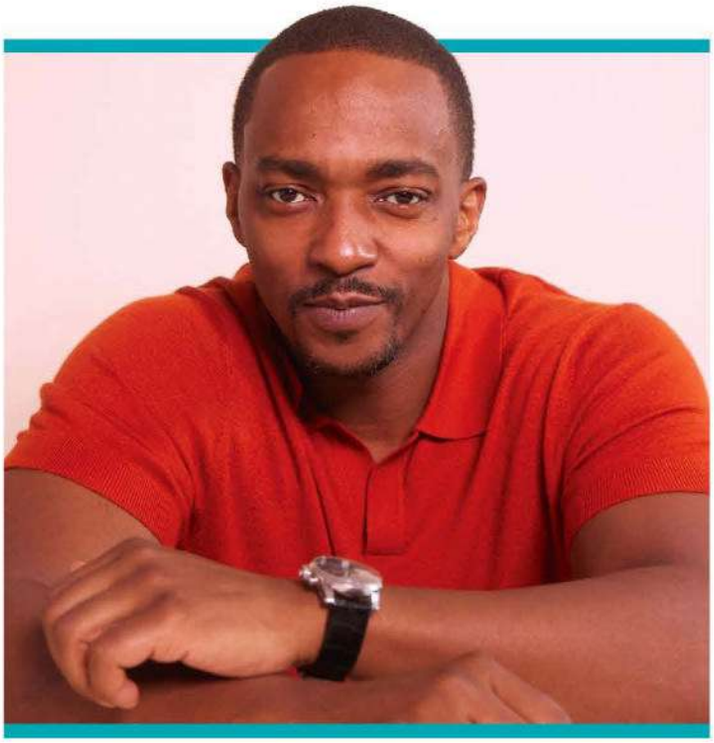
THE HERO



ANTHONY MACKIE
THE ACTOR ON FAME, FALCON AND FIRST-PERSON SHOOTERS...

In 22 years, Anthony Mackie has gone from rapping with Eminem (*8 Mile*) to headlining for Kathryn Bigelow (*The Hurt Locker*) to soaring in Marvel (in *The Falcon and the Winter Soldier* and more). Now the 45-year-old is leading *Twisted Metal*, a vivid post-apocalyptic action-comedy TV show he's also exec producing. 'The whole goal of being an actor is to have no responsibility!' he laughs. Oh well, not on this one...

Were you familiar with the *Twisted Metal* video game?
I was very familiar with it. I just sucked at it. I can't remember one time I won a battle in *Twisted Metal*. I've lost every single time I played. I'm not good with first-person. So if it's a character running through a forest collecting coins, I can do that all day. I can crush that. But if I'm the person who's handling, I'm really bad at that.

How would you describe your character, John Doe?
A whacked-out maniac. John is really unique. I mean, he's an adult, but he's a kid. The great thing about this show is he's experiencing everything for the first time. He's never seen a baby before. He's never kissed a girl before. He's never had ice cream before.

How would you fare in a post-apocalyptic wilderness?
Oh, I'm not faring at all. I don't want to live in a bunker and eat old crackers and peanut butter and rats! No! As soon as the apocalypse comes, take me out. I don't want to have to try and survive. I don't understand people who are like, 'I'm going to beat the odds and live in a hole and get malaria.' No, no, no, no.

You've been on screen for over two decades now. How have you coped with fame?
Fame is a very weird thing for me. It's not a natural emotion. It's not happy, sad, famous, you know? Fame isn't the reason I started doing what I did. I was a theatre kid. I would go and do plays. So the film thing... I happened into that. I didn't go into acting to do movies. I went into acting because I love theatre and storytelling. So it's been a slippery slope.

What do you remember about making *8 Mile*?
8 Mile was my first movie. It's funny to think now, 22 years later, what that movie has turned into and how it kind of defines a generation. But Eminem was great to work with. He's still one of those guys who's a friend.

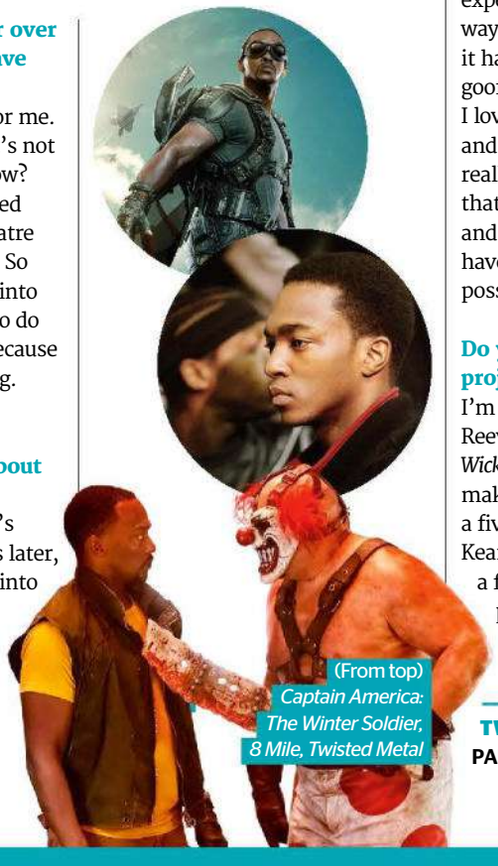
What was it like to meet Clint Eastwood on *Million Dollar Baby*?
Well, it was pretty amazing to see a 70-year-old Clint Eastwood curling 50-pound dumbbells outside of his trailer in between takes!

Was *The Hurt Locker* a big turning point for you?
Oh, *The Hurt Locker* was definitely a huge stepping stone. It was *8 Mile*, *Half Nelson*, *The Hurt Locker*, [and playing Marvel's] Falcon. But *The Hurt Locker* was a huge opportunity. I feel like I'm the most famous actor for getting other actors Oscar nominations! So I tell everybody, 'If you want to get a nomination, you call me. I'm your guy.'

What has playing Falcon meant to you?
It's been huge, man. I never expected the character to grow the way it did and branch out the way it has. I love making those little goofy Marvel movies [laughs]. I love going to set with my friends and showing up for work. It's really refreshing to do something that people are gonna appreciate and look forward to. We just have to give them the best possible product we can.

Do you have a bucket-list project you'd love to do?
I'm really trying to get Keanu Reeves to consider me for *John Wick 5* or *6*. I think that will make me a cool dad if I had, like, a five-minute fight scene with Keanu Reeves. I'm gonna put up a fight! [Pro wrestler] Samoa Joe punched me in the face in this [*Twisted Metal*] and I did not go down! **JAMES MOTTRAM**

'I'M REALLY TRYING TO GET KEANU REEVES TO CONSIDER ME FOR *JOHN WICK 5* OR *6*'



(From top) *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*, *8 Mile*, *Twisted Metal*

GETTY, ALAMY

TWISTED METAL IS ON PARAMOUNT+ NOW.

RISKY

ALFILM.COM/SUBS

BUSINESS

STUNT PERFORMERS ARE GETTING THEIR DUES IN **THE FALL GUY**, A CROWD-PLEASING, GENRE-BLENDING MIX OF ACTION THRILLER AND ROMANTIC COMEDY THAT CELEBRATES THE OLD-SCHOOL VIRTUES OF PRACTICAL ACTION AND STAR CHEMISTRY IN A THOROUGHLY MODERN WAY. *TOTAL FILM* MEETS STARS **RYAN GOSLING** AND **EMILY BLUNT** AND FILMMAKING TEAM DAVID LEITCH AND KELLY MCCORMICK TO FIND OUT HOW THEY STUCK THE LANDING.

WORDS MATT MAYTUM

Even if you didn't grow up on action-packed 80s TV series *The Fall Guy* – which didn't get quite the same traction in the UK as *The A-Team*, *Knight Rider* and *Magnum P.I.* – a cursory glance at the premise makes it sounds like perfect film-adaptation fodder. Lee Majors (*The Six Million Dollar Man*) starred as Colt Seavers, a movie stuntman who uses his day-job skills in a side hustle as a bounty hunter.

That premise also sounds perfect for director David Leitch, the stunt performer turned director behind the likes of *John Wick*, *Atomic Blonde*, *Deadpool 2*, *Fast & Furious Presents: Hobbs & Shaw* and *Bullet Train*, who tells *Total Film* that he 'jumped at it immediately' when the project found its way to his production and action design company, 87North, which he founded with his wife and producing partner Kelly McCormick.

Leitch *did* grow up on the 80s TV series, which was formative for him. 'I watched it as a kid,' he tells *Total Film*. 'Colt Seavers was the coolest guy on the planet – this guy that wasn't looking for the spotlight, but he had a pretty interesting set of skills because he was a stuntman.' While the fun and tongue-in-cheek approach made for great Friday-night family viewing, for Leitch, it ran deeper than that. 'For my generation of stunt people, it led to a lot of us to want to find out what that career was all about,' he says.

Winston Duke as stunt coordinator Dan Tucker

The Fall Guy is an ode to the art of movie stunt work

Aaron Taylor-Johnson as star Tom Ryder and Emily Blunt as his director, Jody Moreno

Working with producer Guymon Casady, who'd brought the project to 87North, Leitch and McCormick quickly assembled a package – Ryan Gosling would star (and also produce), and Drew Pearce (*Iron Man 3*, *Hobbs & Shaw*) was on screenplay duties. Unsurprisingly, it was quickly snapped up by Universal, but like a stunt scrutinised and safety-tested from all angles, it underwent quite a transformation on its journey to the screen.

'That first sizzle was basically an LA noir story, and that's what we sold,' says McCormick. While the film does retain noirish elements (and some tonal similarities with Gosling's 2016 comedy thriller *The Nice Guys*), it's a hell of a lot more besides.

'We had an idea of the investigative engine of what we needed it to be,' says Leitch. 'It's sort of like the origin

While championing the work of the stunt industry, Gosling also did some of his own white-knuckle gags

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'WHO WOULDN'T WANT TO WEDGE A SWEEPING HOLLYWOOD LOVE STORY INSIDE AN ACTION MOVIE?'
DAVID LEITCH

story of the bounty hunter. He's going to get his first mission to find a guy. But then as it started to evolve, we cast Emily Blunt as Jody, and then… the love story's starting to take centre stage – and rightfully so. And Kelly and I are getting more excited about it because who wouldn't want to wedge a sweeping Hollywood love story inside an action movie?'

That openness to reworking the script and finding the film reflects Leitch and McCormick's attitude to shooting, and led to a genre mash-up. Yes, *The Fall Guy* features some of the biggest and most ambitious action set pieces you'll see this year, but it's also a riotously funny meta comedy about filmmaking, a crime mystery, and, yes, a romance, with Gosling and Blunt sharing that witty, *Romancing the Stone*-esque repartee that so many romcoms strive for, but so few manage to deliver.

LAST ACTION HEROES

To hit the brakes on Colt's GMC pickup and reverse a bit, the story of the film – in a slight departure from the show – sees Gosling's stunt performer out of action after an on-set injury. He's drawn back into the moviemaking game to double once again for the world's biggest action star, Tom Ryder (Aaron Taylor-Johnson), on a massive sci-fi epic that's shooting in Australia. Only when Colt gets there, the director isn't best pleased to see him. Jody Moreno (Blunt) is a past flame of Colt's who's getting a shot at her feature debut, and struggling to maintain her cool amid script problems, on-set chaos, and the disappearance of the leading man. So as well as being set on fire and doing barrel rolls in *Fury Road*-esque beach sequences for Jody's film, Colt is also roped in by producer Gail (*Ted Lasso*'s Hannah Waddingham) to find the missing Tom. ('You're a stunt man, nobody's going to notice you. That's your job,' Gail reasons).

And so begins the main plot, with the sparky banter of Gosling and Blunt – who were Barbenheimer rivals in 2023 – foregrounded, alongside a celebration of big-screen stunts. Colt is 'a guy that's relatable in a lot of ways,' says Leitch. 'He's overlooked, like a lot of people feel – they get knocked around, but they get back up, and they just do the job.'

According to Leitch and McCormick, producer/star Gosling was an active contributor ('Creatively, he's

Aaron Taylor-Johnson plays movie star Tom Ryder

The film-within-a-film is a wild, epic, post-apocalyptic western

UNIVERSAL STUDIOS

The production team set out to recapture some old-school movie spectacle

full of ideas,' says Leitch) as the story was coming together, and Blunt had equal opportunity to help shape her character. 'Emily's role was a make-up artist when we sold it, and we converted it to first-time directing right before we gave her a very rough draft,' explains McCormick. 'It made it feel like [the character] had more pressure on her.'

'We all kind of built her together, because I think, maybe in the original script, she was quite severe, and that sort of tough director,' says Emily Blunt, speaking to *TF* from Austria in the week leading up to the Oscars. 'But I think, for me, it's always more interesting to play someone who's in a situation where they're way over their head.' Blunt also says that the character is loosely inspired by *Barbie* director Greta Gerwig. 'With the warmth and the charm, I guess there's a little Greta in there,' she says. 'She was a mix of a few other people I'd met and pulled from.'

Blunt's own ideas led to one inspired scene, as what could've been a straightforward exposition sequence instead became a chaotic 'oner' capturing the bedlam of a movie set. 'You get to see behind the scenes of what really goes on, on a movie set, and someone who is effectively white-knuckling it some days, and is being pulled in a million directions,' laughs Blunt. 'I'm married to a director [John Krasinski – see our interview with him about his new film *IF* on page 50]. I know the chaos that ensues. We just wanted to create that natural chaos that you find on a film set, and yet it's nostalgic. It's a love letter to making movies. And it's to make sure that she seems very real and accessible to everyone.'

'IT'S ALWAYS MORE INTERESTING TO PLAY SOMEONE WHO'S IN WAY OVER THEIR HEAD'
EMILY BLUNT

LESSONS IN CHEMISTRY

Teaming up in 2024, the already powerful pairing of Gosling and Blunt gets a boost from the Barbenheimer effect and the ensuing awards season. The unlikely linking of intense biopic *Oppenheimer* and flouro-pink toy adaptation *Barbie* – by dint of their shared summer release date – created a genuine pop-culture phenomenon, and one that makes their coupling here even more enticing.

'The funny part is, we had to wait for *Barbie* to finish shooting before we could shoot because of Ryan. There were so many small frustrations like, "Really? Is he going to go off and do that *Barbie* movie?" It was more from the studio than us, even. And now we're like, "Oh my God, he made that *Barbie* movie! That was a good thing to wait for!"' laughs McCormick. 'But it's just been this extra sort of waft of excitement there… Barbenheimer or not, they just have so much chemistry together. But they are definitely even hotter than they were a year ago, which is crazy to think about.'

'When he and I worked together [shooting *The Fall Guy*], the Barbenheimer thing hadn't been coined, obviously,' Blunt adds. 'They were two very separate entities. I think it was really wonderful and really funny to us when they got sandwiched [together].'

First-time film director Jody (Emily Blunt) is thrust into the action

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HIGH FIDELITY

DAVID LEITCH ON THE FALL GUY'S ROCKING SOUNDTRACK

'I usually try to bake [song choices] into the script. Kiss' *I Was Made for Lovin' You* was something that I wanted in the movie from the beginning. In my mind, it was a song that connected [Colt and Jody]. We were dealing with wardrobe, and we were making these old, vintage Kiss T-shirts – so that in the flashback, they were working on set, and had Kiss T-shirts. That stuff didn't make it, but the song never left the DNA of the movie.

'When we got into post-production, I tried many songs to replace it, and I couldn't find a song that [worked]. I approached [composer] Dominic Lewis when we were dealing with the score. I said, "Is there a way that we could use the song thematically as Colt's theme?" And so he goes, "Sure!"

'He basically created a suite of moments deconstructed from *I Was Made for Lovin' You*. If you listen to the score, it's really all over the movie. And we licensed it so that we could use it in all these different places. And then we created a ballad version with Yungblud. Hopefully we're releasing that as a single this year.

'But the music's really important. The music in the truck – we tried a lot of things there. It was really Kelly's idea to land on Tay Tay [Taylor Swift's *All Too Well*]. But once we just put it up there, again, this sort of brilliance happened. You're like, "Oh, this makes so much sense. It's so fresh and now." She hadn't even started her world tour, and we had it in there.' **MM**

Stephanie Hsu plays Tom's personal assistant'

Director David Leitch (second left) and stunt performer Justin Eaton (right)

The pair were able to capitalise on it further when they played up the rivalry during an Oscars skit they presented to celebrate on-screen stunt work, giving an early tease of Gosling and Blunt's chemistry.

'Chemistry is one of those things that's a bit ethereal, and not something you can necessarily bottle up,' says Blunt. 'You can fake it with someone, but I guess it's just not as fun. I feel like chemistry comes from an ease and a trust, and a sense of humour.' As well as laughs, spontaneity and a willingness to experiment also helps. 'We would improv a lot, which I think helps with that sort of crackle, and that kind of rat-a-tat feeling that everyone likes,' she adds.

Leitch and McCormick tell *Total Film* about a relevant term that almost made it into the movie, but was cut on account of being too 'inside baseball': locationship. 'It's when people fall in love on location,' explains Leitch. 'There's definitely a reality to that.' Given that Leitch and McCormick are a couple who also happen to be action filmmakers, might some of their relationship be reflected on screen? 'I think there is a little… I think there's a love letter to people that love the business, and find themselves in it,' says Leitch. 'I think that's probably a mirror of us.'

'I heard there were a lot of little romances happening on our set in Australia, especially [among the younger people on set],' says McCormick. 'Like, the PAs who have a bit more time. I heard it was a very romantic set! Maybe it's life imitating art.'

That's not the only behind-the-scenes behaviour that *The Fall Guy* shares with the audience. It's full of meta commentary and inside jokes. And it's not all as far-fetched as you would believe. 'I think all of us in the

making of the movie had our anecdotes,' says Leitch. 'Whether those got heightened or distilled, we all have these crazy stories of what Hollywood is. Even when we turned in the script to Universal, they were like, "This is a little bit crazy." I was like, "Is it, though? Remember that time when this happened?" They were like, "Yeah, you're not wrong."'

Through Taylor-Johnson's off-the-rails egomaniac star ('It couldn't be further from the truth,' says Leitch. 'Aaron is the most down-to-earth, relatable guy'), to the perils of shooting without your third act complete, it's a 360-degree tour of OTT studio blockbusters. Of course, another key 'inside movies' element to get excited about is the stunts. In a world where your characters are making an epic sci-fi western, you've got free rein to go as far as you want with the stunts...

CALCULATED RISK

'We had aspirational stunts that we wanted to do; things that maybe broke records, or things that hadn't been done,' explains Leitch of this perfect showcase for his

'STUNT PERFORMERS HAVE BEEN MAKING ACTORS INTO MOVIE STARS FOR OVER A CENTURY'
RYAN GOSLING

stunt ambitions. Leitch has this in his blood, having started out as a stunt performer doubling for the likes of Brad Pitt and Jean-Claude Van Damme, and having worked his way up as an in-demand stunt coordinator and now a blockbuster director. 'There are several [stunts] that are classic,' he continues. 'With modern rigging and wire removal and CGI, we often do things differently. But to do a high fall into an airbag from heights of 150ft-plus – it's something they just don't do as much of any more.

'It was great to revive that because it's part of the story organically. To build a car that jumps over 200ft, and then to just jump it [for real] – in today's modern movies, maybe you'd do that in visual effects. So those are two of many things we did, like fire gags and car hits and stair falls. It's just a lot of visceral, practical stunts that the stunt team is really proud of.'

The Fall Guy sees a union of stars from *Oppenheimer* and *Barbie*

GUY AND DOLL

RYAN GOSLING ON BARBENHEIMER, HEIGHTS, AND UNSUNG HEROES

First off, enormous congratulations on that Oscars performance...
You know, the *Barbie* party was coming to an end, and there was only time for one last song. I wanted to try and end it on a high note that I could barely hit. I've been on such a *Barbie* high that *The Fall Guy* has been such a perfectly placed stunt crash pad to fall into afterwards [laughs].

You and Emily shot *The Fall Guy* before Barbenheimer blew up. What did you make of that phenomenon?
Well, it was all a big marketing ploy, because – a lot of people don't know this – Barbenheimer was the working title of *The Fall Guy*. It *is* the actual Barbenheimer. It's funny, there was a moment when *Barbie* was playing in the theatre, and *Oppenheimer* was playing two theatres down. And in the middle theatre, between both of them, on the fault line of both *Barbie* and *Oppenheimer*, *The Fall Guy* was test-screening. So little did people know that Barbenheimer was happening in between them [laughs].

You've been attached to *The Fall Guy* since the beginning...
I produced it with David [Leitch] and Kelly [McCormick], and it was just such an amazing opportunity to focus on the stunt community, and the incredible contribution that they've made to cinema. I started on an action-adventure show called *Young Hercules*, so I've had stunt doubles my whole life. Stunt performers have been making actors into movie stars for over a century. It felt like it was only fair to turn the spotlight onto them. And who better to do that with than David Leitch, a former stuntman turned brilliant director?

What was it about the character Colt Seavers in particular that appealed?
I just thought that it was, in working closely with David, a great opportunity to shine a light on these people that aren't taking the

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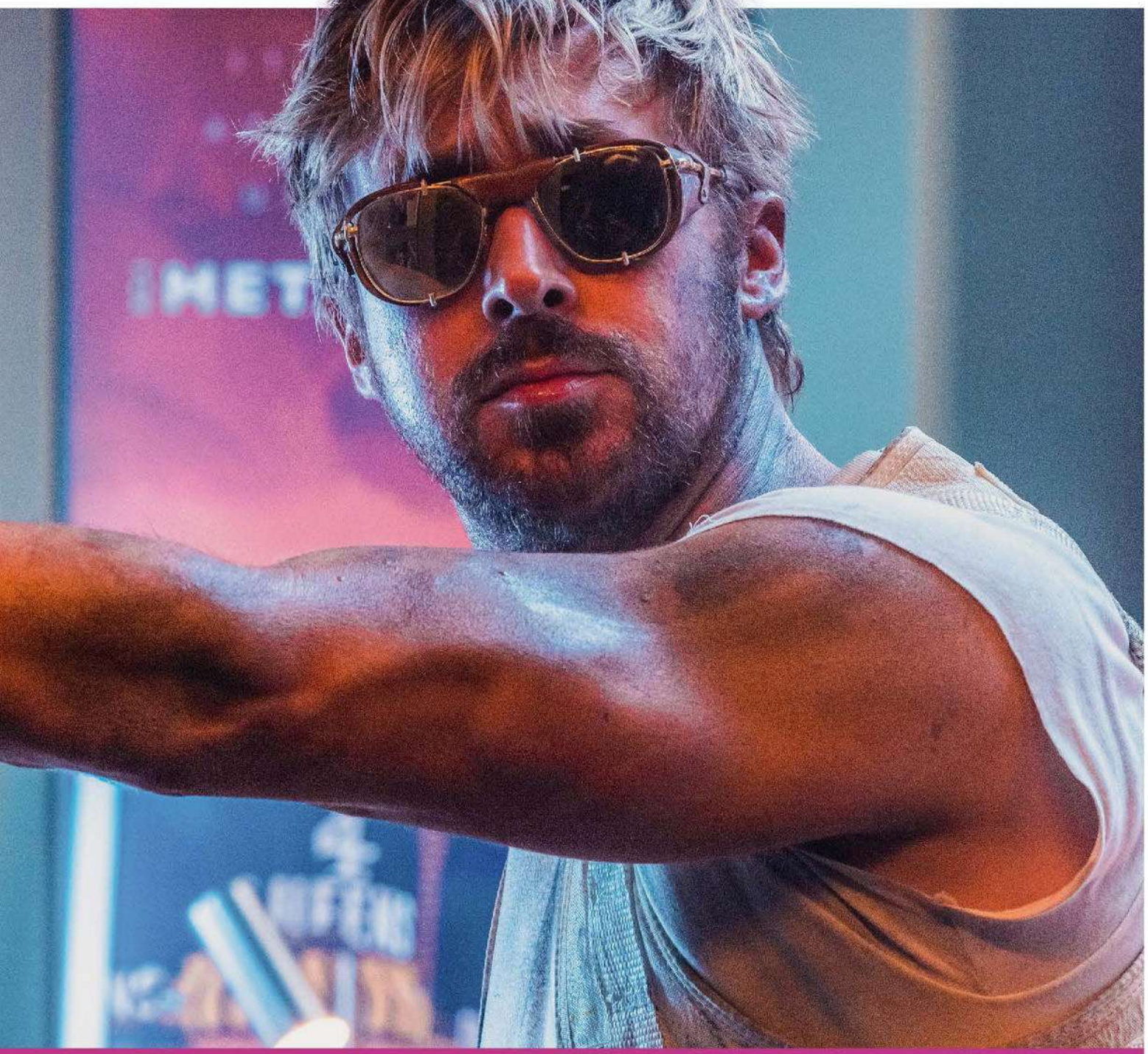

limelight, that really risk their lives and well-being a lot of the time to make other people look good, and to create these moments in movies that sometimes are really the best parts of the film. And they sort of disappear into the shadows when it's over.

You and Emily have great chemistry...
I mean, I think Emily Blunt could create chemistry with a garbage can [laughs]. I've been a fan of hers for years. You can put anybody opposite her, and they're better. It was just a joy to work with her. She really shows up, rolls up her sleeves, and helps you make the movie in any capacity that she can.

What's going through your mind ahead of that descender drop?
Well, I have developed this fear of heights, so my body just starts turning to stone at a certain altitude. This was an opportunity to face that. Look, I was very happy to be the first actor to say I did none of my own stunts in this movie. In any case, where they could do it better – which was in most cases – I was excited for them to do it. But this was one where it was important that I do it. It starts off the movie. This is the fall that Colt takes that sort of changes his life. It's the fall he has to try to overcome for the rest of the film. And the whole thing has sort of been designed to take place at the end of this really long oner.

So it was really important that it be me. And there was a lot of preparation leading up to it, and I had an incredible rigging crew, led by Keir Beck, who was just the best in the business, and also the guy who designed the descender rig itself. I couldn't have been in better hands.

You were dragged across the Sydney Harbour Bridge by a truck, too...
That was not something you could really practice, obviously, because we couldn't get access to the bridge, and we only had access for like an hour. It was really smartly scheduled, because it was at 6:30 in the morning or something. So I was barely awake. And I showed up, and just got dragged across the bridge a few times, and then went back to my trailer to sleep. And I thought, 'That was a weird dream I was having. Or was it a nightmare?' [laughs]

Are there any stunts that have stayed with you from your previous films?
I loved all the work I did with this amazing stunt driver and coach, Jeremy Fry, who worked with me on *Drive*. It was some of the most fun I've ever had prepping for a film, other than this. On this film, I got to work with Logan Holladay [who broke the world record for most barrel rolls here with eight and a half].

But, yeah, that stuff stays with you. And now every time you see an empty parking lot, you think, 'I wonder if I could get away with a few backward 180s, and a little drifting?'

And how much input did you have from a producer perspective? Did it feel rewarding to be able to guide the project yourself?
Well, it was really important to me to produce the film, because it was an opportunity to sort of capture, after 30 years of doing this, a bit of the feeling of what it's like to make a film, and the camaraderie and the atmosphere on set among the crew, and to try to recognise so many of the people that really help you make the film. **MM**

Colt arrives with something to prove after a bad injury

One such big-ticket stunt – which takes place right at the start of the film, and leads to the injury that puts Colt out of action – features a vertiginous fall in a descender (an abseiling-like rig that allows the performer to fall at speed before braking).

'Ryan was game, obviously, to do a lot of things,' says Leitch. 'We dragged him across the Harbour Bridge at 30 miles an hour. We put him on top of a truck, and drove through the streets of Sydney. He was really game to do these stunts. But what was even fresher was that he understood the big picture, and was also really gracious in celebrating the doubles that were making him look good, and wanting to celebrate them in the movie itself. He did some really big stuff. That opening descender, to be candid, was no joke… It's 180ft, I think, or 185ft. It's just pretty intimidating.'

'I do a couple of fights,' says Blunt. 'I adore a fight scene, and I'm very game. But [as for the kind of stunts that] Ryan did – I'm like, "Nope!" That thing he did off the top of that building? I was like, "That's a solid no for me."' She admits that her tolerance for heights hasn't increased as time's gone on, and shudders when she recalls her high-wire entrance in *Mary Poppins Returns*, the 2018 sequel in which she starred as the magical nanny. 'I still have nightmares,' she says. Blunt credits Leitch's 'surety' with giving Gosling the confidence to take that leap of faith. 'It's David's absolute certainty that you will be fine. He's got the best guys [working with him], and you know it.'

'THAT THING [RYAN GOSLING] DID OFF THE TOP OF THAT BUILDING? I WAS LIKE, "THAT'S A SOLID NO FOR ME!"'
EMILY BLUNT

Director Leitch was keen to merge a romance story with huge action

LEAP OF FAITH

When it came to assembling the film's signature set-pieces, Leitch and McCormick say that they built to a crescendo, shooting in roughly chronological order and building to the car leap in the climax. 'The big stunts were baked into the DNA of the movie early on,' says Leitch. 'We knew we wanted to do a homage to some really old-school stunts like the big car jump in *Smokey and the Bandit* [1977] and the high fall from *Sharky's Machine* [1981].' Those elements were built in as 'pillars' of the production – with plenty of rehearsal and development time needed – while some narrative aspects were finessed around them.

This led to another way that art imitated life, as, in the same way that Jody's film struggles for a third act, Leitch and McCormick didn't quite have theirs nailed. 'Everyone was confident, that's why we were joking,' laughs Leitch. 'If we really thought we would have a problem with the third act, we probably would have been more terrified. So we had Jody talk about it [in the film].'

And the way that the team built up to the biggest stunts (working on the final vehicle chase/leap in the sand dunes for a month), reflected what was happening on screen, too. 'You do feel the progression of Colt… getting his mojo back, and then being able to do all these epic moments through the action,' explains McCormick. 'And we were shooting it that way as well. Not only do you feel that it's real, but you feel that energy that we all had. I do think that that hit the celluloid.'

That energy beams through when this team talks

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Emily Blunt threw herself into her fight scenes

Gosling on set with co-star Winston Duke, who plays Colt's friend and colleague Dan Tucker

about the movie. Leitch calls the finished product 'an incredible cinematic experience' and 'a feel-good movie', and there's as much joy evident in celebrating the stunt performers as there is creating a crowd-pleasing time at the movies. 'Most stunt guys I know, they just love the movie life, and they love creating action scenes for fans,' says Leitch. 'They love the thrill of it all, and they love the challenge. But a lot of them are cinephiles, and they really love film… It *is* a technical business, and it's not daredevils any more.'

The film even features BTS footage across the credits, showcasing the stunt crew's efforts. 'If this is our love letter to stunt performers who risk life and limb for us every day, then I think it's a beautiful way to finish the film,' says Blunt. 'It doesn't take you out of the movie, because I think the audience feels that they've been backstage. They've been behind the scenes the whole film. So it's just another layer upon that.'

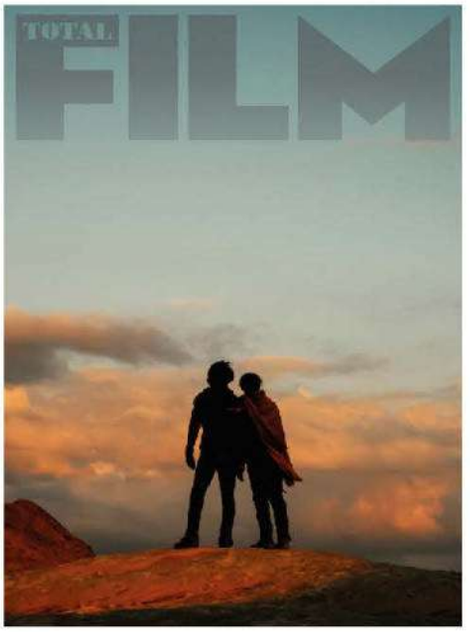
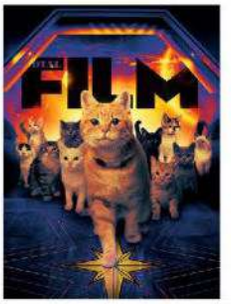
They can also barely conceal their excitement when *TF* suggests that future *Fall Guy* sequels could be on the cards one day. 'We'll have to see if people love it, you know?' says Blunt. 'I would do many Fall Guys if I could. It was just too much fun.'

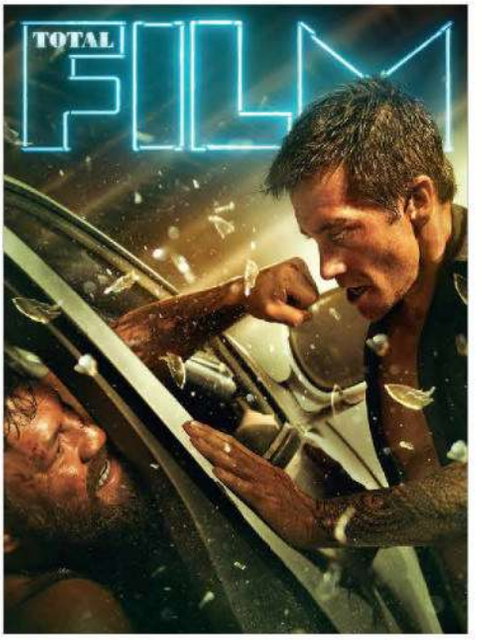
'I know I want to go on a journey with these characters for multiple films,' admits Leitch. 'I want Lethal Weapon numbers. I love these people so much, and also I love these characters… If I could work with this crew and these actors in this world that Kelly and I know so well – yeah, this would be a blast. I hope people want more.'

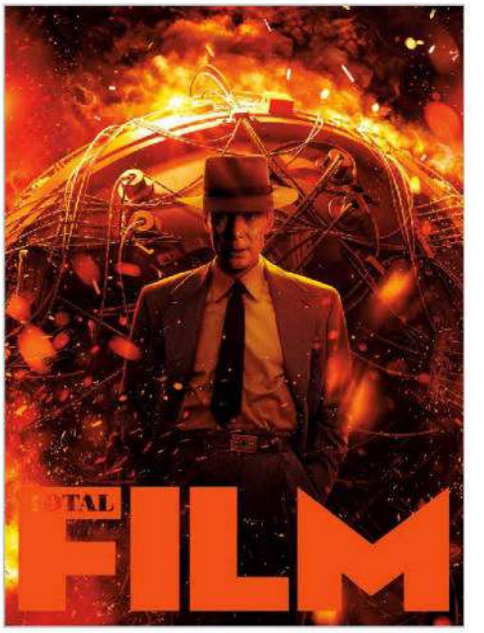
THE FALL GUY OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 2 MAY.

TOTAL FILM

FREE GIFT





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EVOLUTIONARY LEAP

CINEMA'S FOREMOST SIMIAN SAGA CONTINUES TO ADAPT IN LATEST INSTALMENT KINGDOM OF THE PLANET OF THE APES. *TOTAL FILM* MEETS ITS CAST AND CREW TO DISCOVER HOW THE FRANCHISE IS EMBRACING CHANGE IN BOTH STORYTELLING AND TECHNOLOGY.

WORDS KIM TAYLOR-FOSTER

The Planet of the Apes trilogy is one of the most acclaimed of recent years. Both a prequel to and a reboot of (preboot?) the five-movie series that began in 1968 with *Planet of the Apes* – itself loosely based on the 1963 Pierre Boulle novel – the modern reimagining kicked off in 2011 with *Rise of the Planet of the Apes*. Over the course of the three films, we followed the arc of noble, superintelligent ape Caesar. Beginning as a sort of secondary Patient Zero smart-chimp (his mother, Bright Eyes, actually passes the genetic mutation to her son), he would ultimately become a benevolent ape leader in a near-future post-apocalyptic society until his death in trilogy-closer *War*.

But you can't keep a good franchise down. Fast forward to 2024 and audiences are poised for a 'soft reboot'. Director Wes Ball refutes the tag; writer/producers Amanda Silver and Rick Jaffa refer to it as a reset. *Kingdom of the Planet of the Apes* is the fourth in this series, picking up hundreds of years after the events of *War*. Caesar is long gone; forgotten by most. But one ape, a bonobo named Proximus Caesar (Kevin Durand), has twisted Caesar's teachings to his purpose, enslaving apes as he searches for long-lost human technology to reaffirm the new world order, while a young chimpanzee, Noa (Owen Teague), embarks on a journey of discovery – meeting young human Nova (*The Witcher*'s Freya Allan) along the way.

War was released in 2017 by 20th Century Fox. The studio has since been taken over by Disney, so should we expect a film more in line with other 'House of Mouse' fare? It sounds like it, with a coming-of-age element and an emphasis on adventure. Maze Runner trilogy director Wes Ball captains the fourth film, taking over from outgoing helmer Matt Reeves (and Rupert Wyatt, who directed *Rise*).

'These movies are regarded as one of the best trilogies in a long time,' Ball tells *Total Film* over Zoom as we chat some six weeks ahead of the production deadline. He's working daily into the early hours. Today, though, he's energised; animated, even. 'It's one of the few, or last [trio of], thinking-person's blockbusters.'

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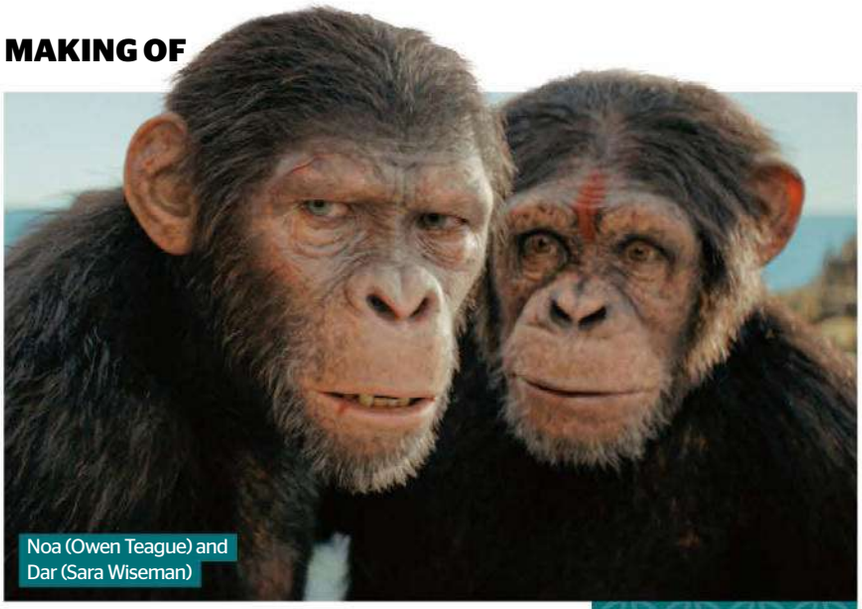

Noa (Owen Teague) and Dar (Sara Wiseman)

It's why he initially hesitated to tackle a fourth film. Reeves and Wyatt left big shoes to fill. Encouraged by Reeves, with whom he'd worked on a cancelled adaptation of graphic novel *Mouse Guard* (a casualty of the Disney–Fox merger: 'I still have hopes that one day that project might come back because it's really a special one; it was a giant mo-cap *Avatar*, [with] medieval fighting mice'), Ball also had performance-capture king Andy Serkis, who he'd cast in *Mouse Guard*, offering help. The Disney takeover ultimately made it even easier to say 'yes' when it was suggested that Ball target a different audience – newcomers to the franchise and families alike – from the Caesar trilogy's male-dominated turnout. One big ol' time jump later and suddenly it was a spicier challenge. 'It opens up a lot of really interesting opportunities – [exploring] what has happened in that time. We get to learn new things and be exposed to new ideas the same way that Noa is.'

Making a film you could take your kids to was always on the table at conception when the project was still governed by Fox, driven largely by the story. 'Part of the idea was that it is a coming-of-age story. It's got slightly more of a feel of adventure than the previous ones,' says franchise writer and producer Jaffa, speaking to *TF* over Zoom as he sits side-by-side with collaborator wife Silver. A bust of an Apes chimp peers over their shoulders. They naturally, rather than actively, avoided anything that might make it too intense for younger children. The franchise is, by nature, thoughtful, philosophical. 'But at the same time, it's very accessible emotionally,' says Silver. 'And Wes has done an amazing job infusing it with energy and making it a fun ride. So, it's both things at once.'

Ball drops the name of author Joseph Campbell, who wrote about the archetypal hero's journey, and whose work George Lucas credits with shaping *Star Wars*. *Kingdom* follows a similar classic narrative path. 'Noa fits that archetype of Frodo Baggins and Luke Skywalker,' explains the director. 'He's a new character we can identify with, appreciate, respect, because he's incredibly kind and nice. But he is going to undergo this great transformation, or at least the beginnings of one in this movie, where that innocence is robbed of him a little bit.'

Ball labels the teen chimp a new Caesar prototype who has to 'carry that torch forward into subsequent movies' – providing they get the go-ahead to make more, that is. 'He's from a village called Eagle Clan, which has its own kind of lies,' says Noa actor Owen Teague, drawing a parallel to the regime under which Proximus Caesar's apes live. 'It's not really lies. It's just ignorance. They keep to themselves. They're an isolationist society. It's

'PART OF THE IDEA WAS THAT IT IS A COMING-OF-AGE STORY'

RICK JAFFA

Noa, with the wise orangutan Raka (Peter Macon) and Nova

Freya Allan as Nova, who is 'smarter than the other humans'

20TH CENTURY STUDIOS

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Anaya (Travis Jeffery), Noa and Soona (Lydia Peckham)

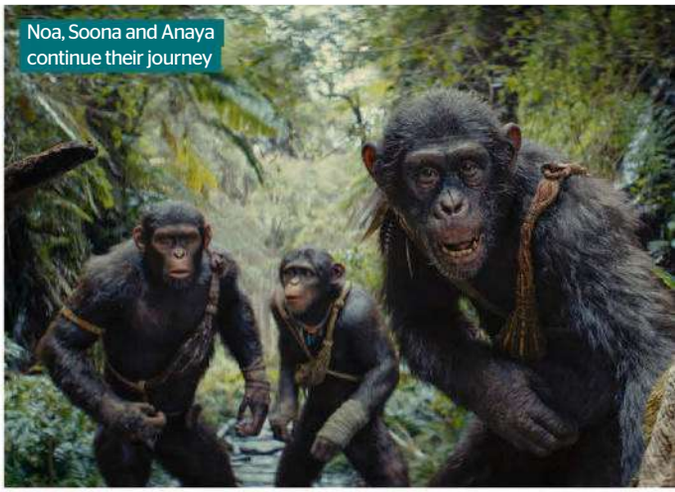
'NOA'S INNER DESIRE IS TO LEARN ABOUT THE WORLD, TO SEE WHAT'S OUT THERE'

OWEN TEAGUE

a small village but they have a territory. And Noa isn't allowed outside that territory. The majority of the clan are kept within the boundaries.' Noa's clansmen (clansapes?) are ignorant about the world outside, knowing nothing of Caesar or where apes came from. In true Disney movie fashion, Noa yearns to discover the bigger picture. 'The thing that drives him in his story is saving his people. But his inner desire is to learn about the world, to see what's out there, which is something that his father isn't really eager for him to do.'

It's this curiosity that leads Noa to explore beyond the confines of his camp. Production designer Daniel T. Dorrance describes a real-life abandoned train tunnel they found in Australia, where they shot, that became a pivotal part of the film. It introduces one of several nods to the 1968 *Planet of the Apes* starring Charlton Heston as marooned astronaut Taylor.

Noa and Eagle Clan elder Koro (Neil Sandilands)



Noa, Soona and Anaya continue their journey

'WE LIKE TO THINK THAT ALL OUR CHARACTERS HAVE AN AGENDA OF SOME KIND'

RICK JAFFA

'That became the border between the Eagle Clan village and the Forbidden Zone, which is where Noa is told you never go,' says Dorrance. In the original films, the Forbidden Zone is an area off limits to most apes. It's where relics of the old world of human dominance lie. Noa, naturally, decides to cross the border. 'He's going into a world he's never seen before,' says Dorrance. He discovers cities and other human artefacts, and he meets the orangutan Raka (Peter Macon), from whom he learns a great deal.

Noa also meets Nova, a girl smarter than other humans, most of whom have regressed to feral creatures like those from the 1968 film. Should we be suspicious of Freya Allan's character?

'We like to think that all of our characters have an agenda of some kind,' says Jaffa, obliquely. 'When characters act and react and speak, they're acting towards something they want. And so, wherever she is on the evolutionary trail – up, down or sideways – like all characters, she does have needs and wants.'

Importantly for the story, Nova is a looking glass for the audience through her pairing with Noa. 'Their relationship is symbolic of looking beyond everything they've ever known of one another's species and realising there are far more parallels and commonalities between the two of them than they might have originally imagined,' says Allan.

Nova is a name apes have adopted for humans, hence its repetition through the franchise. It comes originally, remarks Allan, from the book where the character is likened to a supernova because of her beauty. 'Noa also calls her Echo, which I love.' With so many callbacks to the original 1968 *Apes* and its sequels, more than ever fans are looking for definitive answers as to how these movies all fit together. The events of Matt Reeves' instalments line up to some degree to the future depicted in the Charlton Heston movie, which is still nigh-on two millennia ahead of *Kingdom* in the timeline, 'but it's not like a rigid canon thing,' says Ball. He approached the film as being related to all the movies in that they point towards the same ideas. 'Fortunately, in our story, we don't really have to [address it]. It's too early for [Taylor] to show up anyway, so we don't have to go there yet.'

The believable, gritty universe of Reeves' films might not allow much space for time-travelling astronauts, but Ball is all for human beings coming back and being exposed to a world that is totally new to them conceptually. 'Maybe it's not literally time travel – but never say never. There's always a chance.'

With hopes for *Kingdom* to kickstart a new trilogy and one more after that, Jaffa and Silver have ideas about where they want the story to go. The start of the 1968 film, perhaps? 'It would be cool if we could pull that off,' says Jaffa. 'There's a natural progression toward that.

Noa – a character that 'fits the archetype of Frodo Baggins or Luke Skywalker'

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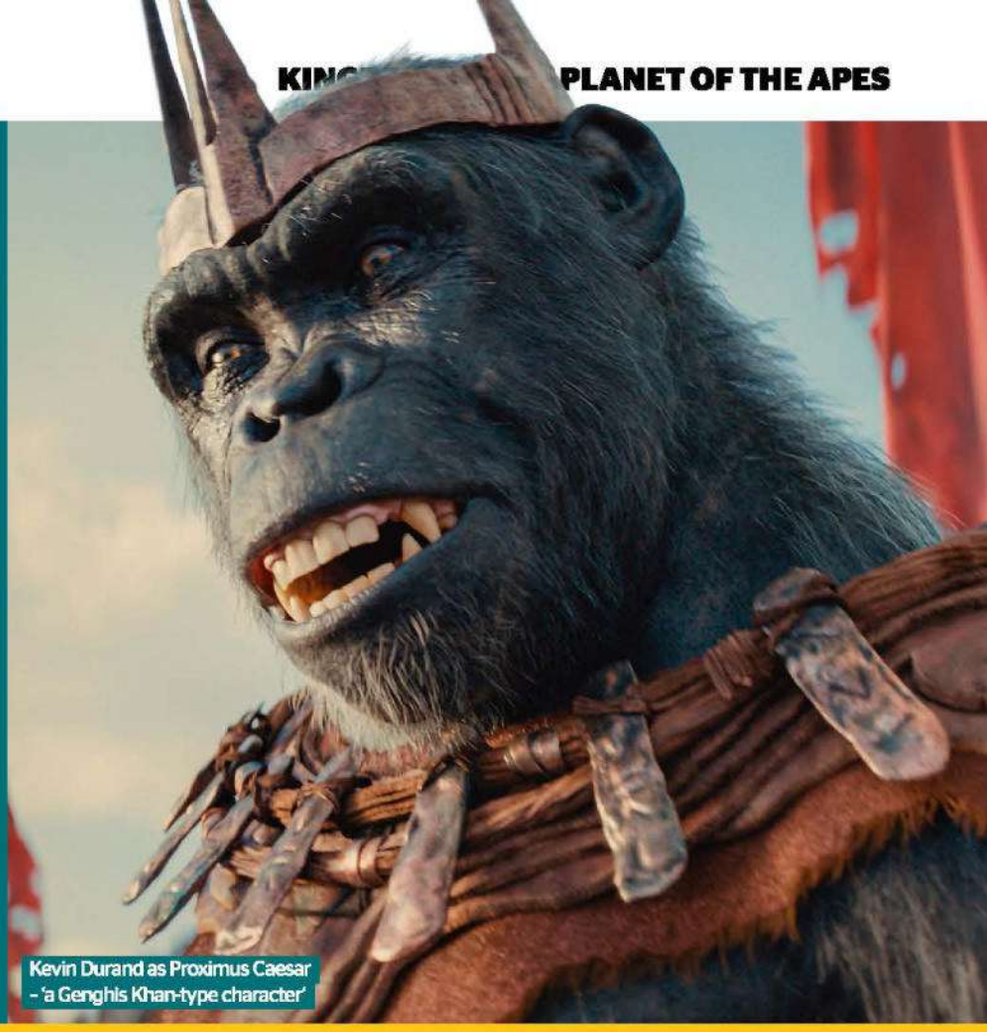
GOING APE

MOVEMENT COACH ALAIN GAUTHIER TALKS APE SCHOOL

In the movie, we have four species [of ape]. The bonobo is essentially a chimpanzee. There's not much difference. Orangutans are quite different, both in their body proportions and the way they move. They are very strange; slower. Gorillas have a very different posture. Those actors required different training. One person had to play a gorilla and a chimpanzee. The basic concept is the same but the posture is different.

Kevin Durand's demeanour is that of an antagonist. As soon as he got the format of the ape, in this case the bonobo, the character came beautifully. When I work with the actors, I first have to do the biomechanical work with them, the physiological aspects, to impress it into the actor. The second part is starting to play the character, and seeing how the 'new body' of the actor will react in each scene. For him, it was so natural. He actually came out scarier and more imposing than I expected.

I went to town deconditioning the human beings. We started with walking and looking at the environment, training their minds to not know that anything has a name. Everything comes from feeling the ground and observing the environment to recognise what could be danger and what could be food. I had them walking for hours just dropping their habits. I had to decondition them to have a neutral but efficient walk. From there, I trained them to react to danger in a way that is wild, animalistic. They just simply turn around and run away for survival. They wouldn't exhibit fear. **KIM TAYLOR-FOSTER**



Kevin Durand as Proximus Caesar – 'a Genghis Khan-type character'

We always thought if you set the dominoes up in just the right way, in terms of science and science fiction, then if you just hit one domino, we could certainly get to that movie.'

None of them wants to remake *Planet of the Apes* like Tim Burton did, but, says Jaffa, 'certainly there's a question of how Colonel Taylor ended up on that beach.' Meanwhile, *Kingdom* has some major callbacks to the original movie that pay homage on one level and presage what's to come on another. One is the human round-up sequence ('There is a mirroring in our film to that first one but it's also completely different,' says Allan). Another has echoes of the Statue of Liberty sequence: the discovery of the observatory, seen in the trailer. 'That's our Statue of Liberty moment,' Dorrance tells *TF*.

'IT'S NOT ABOUT IMITATING A CHIMP'
OWEN TEAGUE

One aspect that doesn't pay homage to the original, aesthetically speaking, is the representation of the apes, played anthropomorphically first time around by actors in make-up and costume. As with *Rise*, *Dawn* and *War*, performance capture was used in *Kingdom* to create realistic apes with the help of the digital effects supremos at New Zealand's Weta FX. For this, the actors attended movement coach Alain Gauthier's six-week-long ape school to learn how to incorporate simian motion into their performances.

Says Teague: 'It wasn't like Alain was teaching us to impersonate chimpanzees… He was really helping us figure out who these characters were.' Voice work was critical – this is where Apes veteran, *King Kong* actor and mo-cap specialist Andy Serkis (Caesar himself)

The latest instalment follows 2017's *War for the Planet of the Apes*

The film contains numerous callbacks to the original 1968 movie

stepped in. He Zoomed with the cast individually to give them pointers, such as building the voice from the stomach rather than the throat.

'The thing that he stresses is that it's really not different from any other kind of acting; it's just that the ape body is a costume and you put it on and that's just how this person moves,' says Teague. 'You still do all the other work that you would do. It's not about imitating a chimp.' With cameras also strapped to actors' faces to record their expressions, however, it was crucial for them to be aware of the difference between human and ape physiognomy and adjust accordingly.

'[Apes] don't smile [like humans],' explains Teague. 'Their smile is drooping the lower lip, so anytime Noa is laughing or happy he's not like, "Say cheese." His lip goes down. That ended up feeling very normal to me after a few weeks… I've got a chimpy face anyway so that helps!'

Allan joined in some of the movement lessons, but as a human character, she had a different remit. Albeit a human different from us – even if she wasn't quite feral like the film's other humans ('It was a different process for me because of Nova's backstory') whose movement coaching was more involved.

'There's a sort of rabbit-in-headlights quality to the physicality,' says Allan of playing a human, even an intelligent one, living in an environment where apes are the dominant species. 'It was important in terms of just feeling uncomfortable being around these apes and how scary that is, but also feeling "less than" in terms of how the world is and how humans are within this world.'

Kevin Durand, who plays antagonist Proximus Caesar, took to ape school like a bonobo to a tree. 'I'm probably more ape than most, and so is Owen,' says Durand. The two first properly met monkeying around when the cameras weren't rolling. 'There's human vanity, looking around like, "Wow, people are going to think we're nuts." And then, finally, I gave in and my chest puffed out… We set off on 45 minutes of just pure fun, improvising, without having met him as a human, really.'

Ball envisioned Proximus as a Genghis Khan-type character, whose 'ultimate goal is to build a world for apes' as his kind begins to mirror humanity's march through civilisation – at a far quicker pace as a result of discovering human advancements. Durand saw Proximus as the first truly high-thinking ape. 'He drew a lot of inspiration from the words that Caesar left behind. But

WETA AND WILD

VISUAL EFFECTS SUPERVISOR ERIK WINQUIST ON THE FILM'S TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCES

For *Rise*, we were able to leverage the years of technology development that went into making *Avatar*, and take all that technology outside into the sunshine. In a similar cycle, 10 more years go by of development on performance-capture technology and we were able to leverage a number of things that were developed for *Avatar: The Way of Water*, taking them out into the Australian bush and utilising them in the wild instead of the controlled space of a stage.

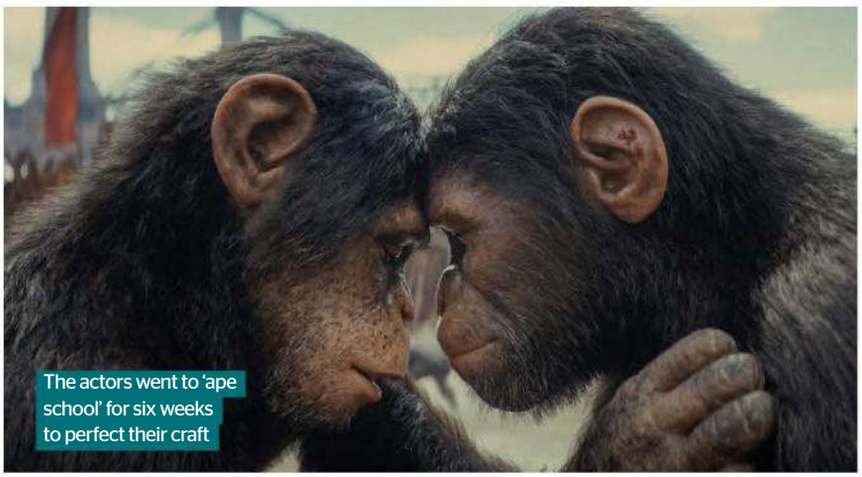
On the previous films, actors had a single face camera sticking out on a boom in front of them. The *Avatar* process and the miniaturisation of technology facilitated having two cameras in a similar arrangement. So we're now able to leverage stereo depth of the actor's face. From those views, we can make a 3D depth mesh of their face that gives us a much better view of what their face is doing during a performance.

Really small machine-vision cameras mounted to the [main] motion-picture camera allowed us to generate 3D depth meshes of whatever the motion-picture camera was photographing. If, for whatever reason, we weren't able to get a full mo-cap volume set up out in the forest, we could leverage those cameras as a way to essentially extract what the actor's body was doing.

We also benefited from technological advancements on other films like *Avengers: Endgame*. For example, using machine learning on top of our facial animation to add additional layers of nuance to facial performances for our ape characters. This didn't exist when we did *War for the Planet of the Apes*. **KIM TAYLOR-FOSTER**

'WE GET TO LEARN NEW THINGS AND BE EXPOSED TO NEW IDEAS – THE SAME WAY NOA IS'

WES BALL



The actors went to 'ape school' for six weeks to perfect their craft

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Noa's quest is to help the humans

Nova and the rest of the humans live in fear of the apes

The filmmakers hope that *Kingdom* will prompt a new trilogy in the franchise

he interpreted them to fit his philosophy of what needs to happen to ensure a future for apes,' says Durand. 'Sure, there's some narcissism, but I truly believe he was like, "Unless we do it this way, we're going to end up back where we were hundreds of years ago. We're not going to be able to have any control in society unless we continue to evolve." So he studied human history like crazy. He learned everything that he possibly could about the empires that rose and fell.'

PRODUCTION PERFECTION

Kingdom is the hardest movie Ball has ever had to work on, in a post-production sense: 'There's not a lot of movies that do it this way; it's a very specific process.' The director, however, is enthused as he works towards a fast-approaching deadline. 'It's ridiculously fun. I'm a tinkerer, I'm a perfectionist. I can talk about every little pixel; I can change that little thing. See that highlight right here? That needs to be over here, not there. I could sit here for another year just honing this movie. Of course – what did Kubrick say? – films are abandoned, not finished. That will be the case here, too.'

'THERE'S A RABBIT-IN-THE-HEADLIGHTS QUALITY TO THE PHYSICALITY OF PLAYING NOVA'
FREYA ALLAN

Noa: 'a new character we can identify with'

Will he do another? He says it would be 'awesome' to, but that there are other movies he wants to tackle. Like his next project, a screen adaptation of seminal video game *The Legend of Zelda*. He stands and unzips his hoodie to reveal a T-shirt featuring Japanese typography emblazoned above a picture of *Zelda* protagonist Link.

'I have this awesome idea,' he teases. 'I've been thinking about it for a long freakin' time, of how cool a *Zelda* movie would be. We've got another few weeks before we're supposed to turn over [*Kingdom*] and off it goes into the world to do what it's going to do. Then I'll probably take a short break to recharge. Then we'll go off to the races. I want to fulfil people's greatest desires. I know it's important, this [*Zelda*] franchise, to people and I want it to be a serious movie. A real movie that can give people an escape. That's the thing for me about those games – I want to live in that world. That's the thing I want to try to create – it's got to feel like something real. Something serious and cool, but fun and whimsical.'

That might sound like a grand ambition – but if he pulls off *Kingdom of the Planet of the Apes*, there's every reason to beat his chest for what's next.

KINGDOM OF THE PLANET OF THE APES OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 10 MAY.

PURE IMAGINATION

DURING THE DARKEST DAYS OF THE PANDEMIC, JOHN KRASINSKI DREAMED OF AN ESCAPE FOR HIS YOUNG CHILDREN. THE RESULT IS *IF* – A DEEPLY FELT FAMILY MOVIE ABOUT AN UNSEEN WORLD OF IMAGINARY FRIENDS, STARRING RYAN REYNOLDS. *TOTAL FILM* CATCHES UP WITH KRASINSKI TO TALK BIG DREAMS, BIG EMOTIONS AND BRINGING A SENSE OF WONDER BACK TO SUMMER MOVIE SEASON.

WORDS **JORDAN FARLEY**

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Cal (Ryan Reynolds) with imaginary friend Blue, voiced by Steve Carell

Cast your mind back to March 2020. While half the planet binged *Tiger King*, cultivated sourdough starters and stockpiled loo roll, John Krasinski was hard at work on *Some Good News* – a charmingly low-rent YouTube show with a single purpose: to put something positive into the world when the world needed it the most.

'When I saw the power of that, and certainly how much I got out of it, I just said, "Well, what if I did a movie that was basically *Some Good News* in movie form?"' a typically affable Krasinski tells *Total Film* during a break from filming Guy Ritchie's *Fountain of Youth* in the UK. 'I thought, "Let's make a movie that is a hug waiting there for everybody if they need it."' The process took on even greater urgency as the multi-hyphenate filmmaker observed the 'lights go out' behind his children's eyes during lockdown, with imagination and courage rapidly taken over by uncertainty and fear. 'All of a sudden, I was like, "Oh my god, I can't stand by and allow this to be their reality." So I immediately had the idea: "OK, I'm going to start writing the script, and see where it takes me."'

Involving his two young daughters from the get-go ('I think they have producer credits on this movie,' he quips), Krasinski developed a pre-pandemic idea, about 'imaginary friends, and the importance of them', in a way that would speak to the moment. 'Instead of making some zany comedy, what's the heartfelt version of this?' Krasinski asked himself. 'I was actually doing a bunch of research into child psychology, and realised that kids and their IFs [imaginary friends] are projections of things that they need, whether it's a bodyguard if you're getting bullied at school, or if your parents had a divorce, it fills in the blank of someone who you could talk to about that. So it was really powerful stuff. Then, of course, the pandemic hit and my idea was: "What if you made it about coping?"'

Played by Cailey Fleming (*The Force Awakens*, *The Walking Dead*), Bea is going through a tough time at home when she suddenly develops the ability to see a world of wacky imaginary friends, abandoned by children who have outgrown them. Krasinski himself plays Bea's dad, who, in a development that any therapist would have a field day with, 'is trying to do everything he can to keep his daughter knowing that you don't have to grow up', he says. 'It's heartbreaking!'

> 'RYAN AND I HAVE ALWAYS BATTED THE IDEA AROUND THAT IT'D BE REALLY FUN TO WORK TOGETHER'
> JOHN KRASINSKI

IF also reunites *The Office* (US) stars Krasinski and Steve Carell on screen for the first time in the 11 years since that beloved comedy came to an end, with Carell voicing supremely huggable IF Blue. 'We were front row to the idea that this was our tiny *Office* reunion,' Krasinski says. 'But as much fun as it was to work with him, the most powerful part about it was he came in with the most heartfelt speech about how proud he is of me to be making movies. He said in reading the script, "I'm just so honoured to be a part of it. I'll do whatever it takes." So when I thought that I would be laughing all day, I was crying all day.'

After years immersed in the brutal, nerve-jangling world of *A Quiet Place* and its sequel, Krasinski considers *IF* another 'huge departure, and a big swing' following his unlikely transition from sitcom star to lauded genre filmmaker. 'It's very hard to step out of your comfort zone – all the way from *The Office*, to deciding to do a genre movie. And the same holds true here. It's not that I'm ever running away from anything, but I'm actually running towards something new… and it was certainly a much brighter world to live in than *A Quiet Place*. Let's put it that way!'

Cailey Fleming stars as Bea

PARAMOUNT

Ryan Reynolds and Cailey Fleming bring the magic

1 NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH

Before Krasinski committed a word to (digital) paper, he had his leading man in mind. 'Ryan [Reynolds] and I have always batted the idea around that it'd be really fun to work together,' he says. Initially intrigued by Krasinski's 'imaginary friend idea', and the opportunity to make a film his four children could watch without earmuffs, Reynolds became 'really, really excited' as Krasinski zeroed in on the movie's emotional core: 'a movie about what it's like for kids to go through hard times'.

Sharing the same perceptive ability to see IFs as Bea, Reynolds' neighbour Cal is reluctantly drawn into 'a live-action Pixar movie', as Reynolds told audiences at last year's CinemaCon. 'The two of them became something purely magical once they got to act together,' Krasinski says of his co-leads. 'Cailey is a full-blown shooting-star, beam-of-light type of person, and the whole process with Ryan has been a true joy. It's been a partnership the whole time where you're not just cold-calling an actor and asking him to be in it, you know you're getting a partner from the beginning. He's a force of nature, for sure.'

2 PLUSH HOUR

Despite making *A Quiet Place* and its 2021 sequel, which feature far less friendly CG creations, Krasinski initially felt unprepared for the challenge of a full live-action shoot populated by an extensive cast of digitally rendered characters. 'A lot of times in my career, I've lived by the whole "ignorance is bliss" adage. I probably should look into that…' To prepare, Krasinski shot a test scene, glimpsed in finished form in the trailer, in which Cal meets main IF Blue ('Who, yes, is purple, but his kid is colour blind, so that's why he's called Blue,' Krasinski clarifies) for the first time. 'I shot that whole scene as a test for the studio and for me,' he says. 'It was secretly a huge advantage for me to run through this whole thing in my head, and see what it would look like.'

Krasinski also came up with a creative way to represent the IFs on set. 'I said to this incredible group of puppeteers, "Let's build stuffies [soft toys] of these things, just so that they can interact [on-set]." And then, because I, probably to a very annoying degree, love to get hands-on, I was the one shoving these stuffies into Ryan and Cailey's faces at all times. I probably took it a little too far. I was getting very, very excited to attack people with stuffies.'

Krasinski with one of the toys made to represent the CG characters

Steve Carell was the director's pick to voice loveable IF Blue

3 SPEAKING UP

To play Blue, Krasinski turned to an old friend from work. 'I definitely, when I was writing, had Steve [Carell] in my head,' Krasinski says of his fellow American *Office* alum. 'He is a person that you want to just run up to and hug, and that's exactly what Blue is.' Carell's character is one of three central IFs, alongside Phoebe-Waller Bridge's Blossom and Louis Gossett Jr.'s Louis, the bear. 'He's basically the de facto head of all the IFs, the one who gathered them all,' Krasinski explains. 'Imaginary friends always want to be around either where kids are or have been. So Louis has the great idea to have them all congregate under Coney Island so that they can always be around kid energy.'

Krasinski had all three main imaginary friend actors record a first run of their lines before the shoot, 'just so I could have their voices on board for the actors to reference. And then everybody else [recorded] in post.' And by everybody, Krasinski means *everybody*, with the well-connected star thoroughly mining his contacts app. 'As I started writing all the great side characters, I just called all my friends and asked if they would do it. And I've got to say, I've never had quicker yeses, especially from people who have kids,' says Krasinski of a supporting cast that includes Matt Damon, Sam Rockwell, Awkwafina, Jon Stewart, Maya Rudolph and his wife, Emily Blunt. 'I know that I will never assemble a cast like this again. Mathematically, it was half of Hollywood.'

4 VISION QUEST

Much like Bea and Cal, Krasinski was the only person on set who could truly see his cast of imaginary friends. 'Every director has to sort of incept the rest of the crew with their idea. But this one was very, very singular, and it was one of those things where I had to become as articulate as possible about what the hell was going on in my head,' Krasinski explains. 'It was like, "So we're under Coney Island where all the imaginary friends live. This girl is going to transform the world completely, and walls are going to fall down. The rug is going to turn into floor tiles." And people would say, "Whatever drug he's on sounds real fun."'

Despite working with visual effects on the Quiet Place films, Krasinski describes the post-production process on this film as 'unequivocally different' owing to the extent and involvement of the all-CG IFs. 'Most of what's happening in *A Quiet Place* is through the actors. You have creatures just sort of scuttering around here and there. Here, your main characters aren't even there yet.' Instead of shooting with visual-effects restraints in mind, Krasinski was encouraged by VFX house Framestore to shoot as though the IFs were real actors on set. 'They said, "You just shoot the movie you would shoot if they were here, and let us figure out how to do it,"' Krasinski recalls. 'We really did set up all the shots as if this was their close-up, and their medium shot, and their wide. We did some incredible stuff. It's what makes the movie work, in my opinion.'

An off-the-wall moment for Ryan Reynolds' Cal

Krasinski and Fleming on set; (below) Blossom, voiced by Phoebe Waller-Bridge

5 KIDDING AROUND

Krasinski didn't just make *IF* for his kids, he made it *with* his kids. 'I'm a horrible artist, but I would sketch out a tiny drawing, and they would know the characters before I had even finished the script,' he says. 'We're lucky enough to have toys made for this movie, and I got to bring the prototypes home. They were like, "He's so great. But his hair's longer than it is in the movie. Can you trim it?" And I was like, "Oh my god, this is unbelievable."'

Despite their invaluable quality-assurance contributions, Krasinski's children have yet to see the completed film when we speak, as the finishing touches are put on the visual effects. 'I've never been more scared of showing anyone anything than I am to show my kids this movie,' Krasinski notes. 'Watching my kids watch the trailer was one of the most emotional things I've ever been through, certainly in my career. We'll do our little family premiere – and, in a good way and a bad way, they're the only reviews that I'll be concerned about.' Imagine that.

IF OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 17 MAY.

CHAMPIONS OF BREAKFAST

After decades spent working as a stand-up comedian, Jerry Seinfeld is now a first-time movie director. What's the deal with that? *Total Film* speaks to the sitcom king about the personal reasons behind his star-studded breakfast-based debut, *Unfrosted*...

WORDS
SIMON BLAND

Melissa McCarthy co-stars in this tale of the creation of an iconic breakfast snack

Movies come from lots of dumb ideas but this might be the dumbest,' asserts Jerry Seinfeld, stand-up comedian, TV sitcom rev-olutioniser and first-time movie director at 69 years old. This iconic funnyman may be a little late off the mark when it comes to helming *Unfrosted* – his oddball directorial debut that chronicles the wild and completely made-up tale of how everyone's favourite sugar-loaded toaster pastry came to be – but his observations about the weird things that inspire movies are as timely as ever.

Films often emerge from left-field catalysts – memes, online ads, even Barbie dolls with identity-crisis Kens. For his latest project, Seinfeld has gathered a stacked comedy cast that spans Melissa McCarthy, Amy Schumer and himself to make something unique: a movie that has its origins in a stand-up routine. 'As far as I can tell, it's the first,' he tells *Total Film*, explaining how a comedy bit that he first debuted during a 2010 set on *The Last Show* has led directly to his first film. 'I don't think anybody's done this before.'

Even if you haven't enjoyed multiple viewings of the hugely successful sitcom that bears his name, odds are you probably have a pretty good idea who Jerry Seinfeld is. Born in New York, he made his name in the mid 1970s as an aspiring stand-up comic. His influence on the craft was cemented in 1989 when, alongside *Saturday Night Live* drop-out Larry David, he pitched and sold a comedy series about his seemingly mundane life as a gigging comedian. Infamously billed as 'a show about nothing', *Seinfeld* became an American cultural touchstone. By the time it ended in 1998, *Seinfeld* had run for nine seasons, successfully introduced audiences to a fresh style of socially nitpicky sitcom humour and made Seinfeld and his co-stars the highest-paid actors on telly.

A stickler for not doing anything unless it's done with passion, Seinfeld's refusal to continue the show while it was at its red-hot peak shocked the industry, with the star reportedly turning down a $110m pay cheque for one more season. Instead, he returned to his stand-up roots and, besides indulging in a few passion projects like 2007 animated comedy *Bee Movie* and 2012's web-series-turned-Netflix-show *Comedians in Cars Getting Coffee*, that's largely where he's stayed… until now. So what changed?

SEIN OF THE TIMES

'This never would've happened if it wasn't for COVID because I love being a stand-up comedian,' says Seinfeld, confirming that the world had to grind to a halt before he'd even consider doing anything other than cracking jokes on stage. Speaking to *TF* over Zoom from his Los Angeles home office, each of his answers is punctuated with a sip from a big coffee cup. 'We started writing during COVID literally out of pure boredom,' he continues. 'When I was a kid, I always wanted to be a grown-up. I wanted to be one of those guys who wore a suit and carried a briefcase, so working in a cereal company definitely would've been the ultimate fantasy – and we got a chance to do it.'

Unfrosted sees Seinfeld play a Kellogg's company man who helps to invent the Pop-Tart before their breakfast rivals Post can beat them to the sugary punch. Despite a huge framed Superman poster sitting directly behind him while we chat, Seinfeld's childhood dreams were quite humble – and now they've become an actual reality. However, much like his TV show, Seinfeld didn't think anyone would be silly enough to green-light a project about the history of Pop-Tarts, let alone with him as its director and star.

'Believe me, I couldn't believe Netflix wanted to do it. I showed them the script and they said, "This is fantastic. We've *got* to do this,"' he says, his perpetual smile turning to surprise for a moment. 'I was totally shocked – but you know you're in a good area in comedy when you think, "There's no way they would do this."'

Besides being every dentist's worst nightmare, Pop-Tarts are also a point of fascination for Seinfeld. So much so that they inspired him to write a dedicated Pop-Tart comedy 'bit' where he playfully imagines the circumstances leading to their creation. Seinfeld has tinkered with the 'Pop-Tart bit' since 2010, eventually including it in his 2020 Netflix special *23 Hours to Kill*. Cut to 2024 and with the help of former collaborators Spike Feresten, Barry Marder and Andy

ALAMY, NETFLIX

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Christian Slater with Jerry Seinfeld, who plays the inventor of the Pop-Tart

Robin, he's fleshed it out from a short collection of gags to a fully-fledged film. What made him feel it could survive the jump?

'I never thought it could,' he says candidly. 'The bit is like a minute long and the movie is an hour and a half so we definitely had to find more [substance] but once we got into the world of it, everywhere we looked there was another funny thing to do.' A fresh angle offered by one of his team helped. 'One of the writers said, "Let's do it like *The Right Stuff*." You know, the US versus the Soviets,' says Seinfeld, comparing his Pop-Tart film to Philip Kaufman's 1983 historical space-race drama. 'Suddenly I thought, "Oh, now I see a way to do it." The idea clicked in my head: "Let's make *The Right Stuff*… with cereal."'

TALL TALE

That said, you'd be a fool to hit play and expect to find any actual facts. 'Oh nothing in the movie actually happened,' he chuckles through that familiar Seinfeld smile when asked how he delicately balanced comedy with history. 'I always say that this movie is the opposite of *Barbie*. *Barbie* was made by Mattel. Kellogg's didn't even know we were doing this – and I doubt they would've approved it,' admits Seinfeld. 'Although we've started talking to them recently and they seem very supportive, even though we have them looking pretty silly.'

It also helped that breakfast seems to be a recurring theme throughout almost all of his work. Aside from the 'Pop-Tart bit', the fictionalised version of himself on *Seinfeld* was regularly seen slurping down a bowl of something colourful. Meanwhile, the entire premise of *Comedians in Cars Getting Coffee* has brunch-time snacking at its caffeinated core.

'That's another reason I wanted to do it because there are very few things I love as much as cereal,' he laughs. 'On [*Seinfeld*], above the kitchen sink, there were all kinds of cereal boxes that looked like a library

'ONCE WE GOT INTO THE WORLD OF IT, EVERYWHERE WE LOOKED THERE WAS ANOTHER FUNNY THING TO DO'

and I've always talked about it in my stand-up.' It makes you think: is there something inherently funny about breakfast food? 'It was something they made in the 60s just for kids and they fooled 60s parents into thinking they were giving their kids real food,' smiles Seinfeld. 'All that ignorance and naivete is charming to look back on.'

It's this kind of nostalgic glee that you can expect to find in *Unfrosted*. 'We like to say: "Finally, a movie you can eat,"' he jokes. 'The idea of the film is the fun of being a kid in the 1960s; the things we were allowed to eat, the colourful boxes and the prizes inside [them]. It was very much a 60s childhood throwback thing for me.' A dose of silly humour was also added to sweeten the recipe: 'The idea of stuffy 60s businessmen talking about cereal, sprinkles, puffs and pops is just a fun world to be in.'

THE BREAKFAST CLUB

Another key ingredient? Comedians – and lots of them. Seinfeld's candy-coated cereal world features more rib-ticklers than a Saturday morning breakfast cartoon, with Bill Burr, Fred Armisen, Jon Hamm, Dan Levy and Maria Bakalova among the many names packed into his Pop-Tart odyssey.

'They're all so talented and funny but honestly, the biggest thrill of the whole thing was Hugh Grant. He's so damn funny,' insists Seinfeld of directing this Brit icon during his later-in-life comedic resurgence following turns in *Wonka* and *Paddington 2*. 'You should've heard us screaming at each other on set. I was saying to him: "You don't know anything about comedy. You just know how to be witty in a pub. Here in America, we've got to get real laughs,"' he recalls, half-joking. 'He'd scream back: "I know a lot about comedy!" It was one of the great gifts of making this.'

Still, after years spent laser-focused on refining the perfect gag, the transition to working with improv-happy comics was tricky. 'I love the simplicity and loneliness of stand-up and the movie is the complete opposite; it's so collaborative. I had to dust off my "working with other people" skills from the 90s,' says Seinfeld.

'I'm the biggest pain in the ass you could dream of in comedy; every word has to be exactly as written and a lot of big-time actors don't like that,' he continues. 'Hugh Grant would say, "Give me a chance to find it," and I'd say, "I've already found it. Just do it like *this*." I did let them do whatever they wanted… but first, they had to do it exactly the way *I* wanted it.'

Comics aside, one person you won't see in Seinfeld's movie is the actual inventor of the Pop-Tart, Bill Post. 'He passed away a few weeks ago,' Seinfeld says of Post, who died on 14 February this year, aged 96. 'I don't think we even knew that he was still around so I was a little upset. I thought, "Damn, I should've reached out to him."' Despite playing a Post-like character, Seinfeld didn't use Post's name for fear of throwing viewers: 'It was confusing that there was a guy working at Kellogg's named "Post",' he says of unwanted comparisons to Kellogg's American rival. 'We picked an astronaut-sounding name for my character.'

Arriving into a movie landscape that lauds *Dune*-sized epics and cerebral *Oppenheimer* thinkers, Seinfeld thinks his big, daft comedy can't come quick enough – but don't expect him to make directing a permanent thing. 'I feel like we're ready for a colourful, dumb, silly comedy,' he says earnestly. 'My heroes are the Marx Brothers, Peter Sellers, Monty Python… That's what I live for and my ambition is to be as like them as possible. I have no interest in actual filmmaking.' So this isn't the start of a new career path? 'Well, it might be,' he ponders. 'But it's not going to be anything with any meaning or depth to it.'

Seinfeld admits he's a difficult director for improvisational comics to work with

UNFROSTED STREAMS ON NETFLIX FROM 3 MAY.

R★O★G★U★E

AMERICA IS TEARING ITSELF APART IN ACTION-THRILLER CIVIL WAR. CROUCHING FOR COVER, *TOTAL FILM* ASKS DIRECTOR ALEX GARLAND AND STARS KIRSTEN DUNST, CAILEE SPAENY AND WAGNER MOURA HOW THEY SET ABOUT CAPTURING THE CARNAGE – NOT WITH VFX BUT REAL TANKS, JETS AND EXPLOSIONS – AND IF THIS NEAR-FUTURE NIGHTMARE COULD REALLY COME TO BE...

WORDS **JAMIE GRAHAM**

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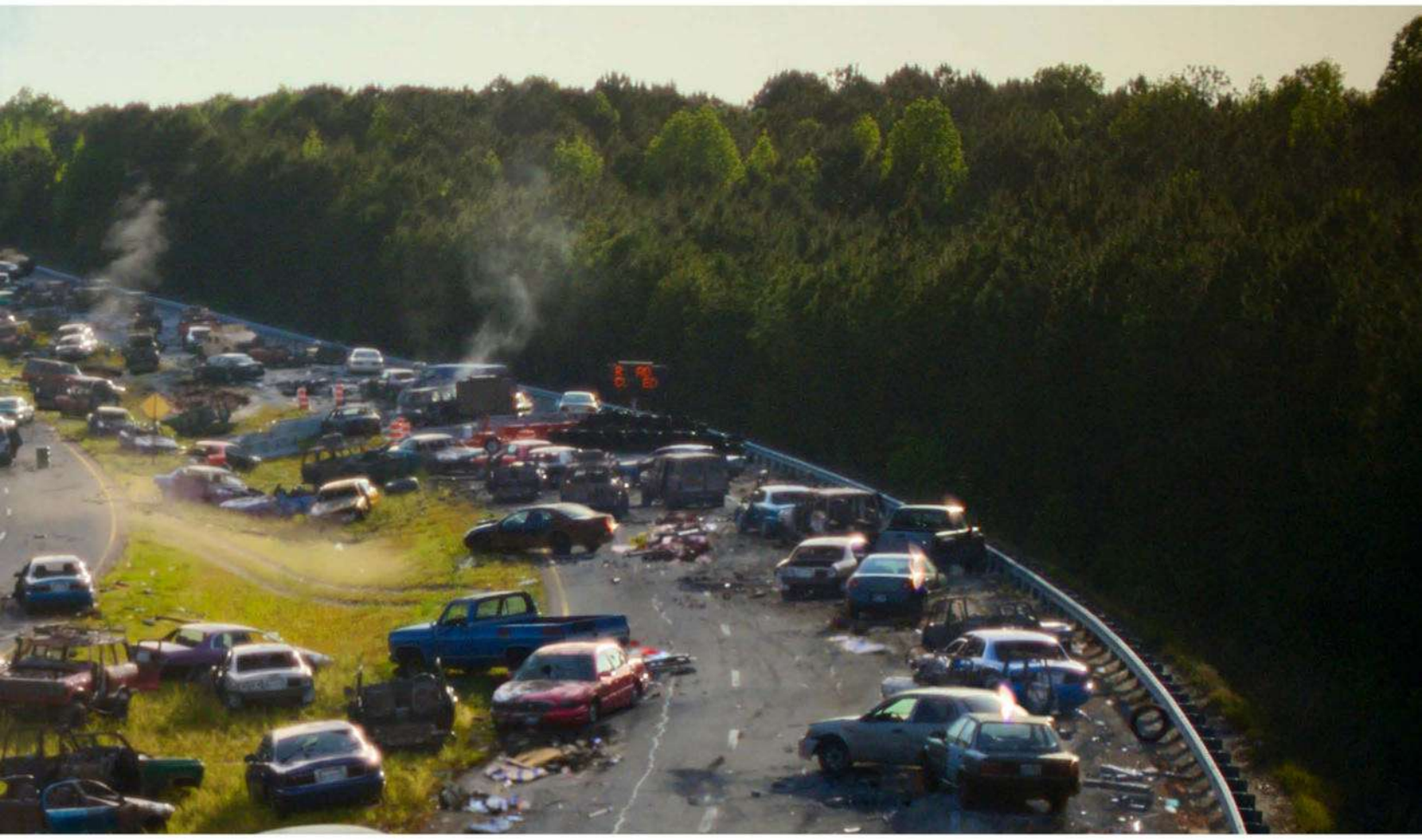

N·A·T·I·O·N

Alex Garland is a deep thinker. It's what you'd expect of the man behind such sci-fi classics as *Ex Machina*, *Annihilation* and TV series *DEVS*, and right now his brow is knitted as he ponders the question that's halted his flow while talking to *Total Film*.

'"How did I go about making this an anti-war film?"'' he mulls, repeating the query. Isn't it true, after all, that many so-called anti-war movies exhilarate viewers with their music and guns, choppers and camaraderie? 'It's a question that I thought about a lot, and really tried to apply myself to. I think that *Apocalypse Now* is masterful; I certainly wouldn't call it an anti-war film.'

Lowering his eyes from the Zoom frame, he pauses to ponder which films he certainly would consider anti-war movies, and comes up

with two: Stanley Kubrick's *Paths of Glory* (1957) and Elem Klimov's *Come and See* (1985). 'To me, I think it's something to do with the way that the effects of war, which relate to violence…' He stops to consider. 'It's not just the way they are presented, but the way they are seated in the heads of the audience. That can be to do with a number of things: it could be to do with music. It could be to do with juxtaposition. For example, here's a thing we often do in film: "There is a problem. What is the solution to the problem? Violence." You "violence" your way out of a problem. And then, of course, there's slow motion used in a particular kind of way, and music used in a particular kind of way.'

The 53-year-old writer/director is deliberating further. Like we said, he's a deep thinker. 'We did little things, I guess. This will sound a bit grim, but we looked at things like: what would you typically see if someone gets shot? Do you see a big spray of blood? And do they yank back as if they have a wire attached to them?

'What you often find is that people just collapse as if someone has turned the lights off. You may or may not see blood. And if you do, it might not be for a little while. [Filmmakers] tend to use big splashes of red in a graphic, declarative way. There are all sorts of rules and rhythms [to films]. And if you disrupt them with something very naturalistic… even if people don't know what the natural version is, they sense the reality of it.'

Garland looks up, almost like he's coming out of a daze. 'But I'm talking as if I know the answer to your question, and I don't. I'm doing the best I can. You would not want to make a pro-war movie.'

Nick Offerman plays the tyrannical POTUS

Kirsten Dunst as Lee, one of the journalists who track the rebel forces

ALTERED STATES

Civil War is something different for Garland. Though set in the near-future, he does not regard it as sci-fi, but rather a war movie and an action film, and a thoughtful thriller akin to the movies that Alan J. Pakula made in the 70s – *Klute*, *All the President's Men*, *The Parallax View*. He wrote it during the pandemic, when death and catastrophe were very much on his, and everyone else's, mind, and he was pushed towards the scenario by the fervid polarisation evident in the populations of America, Britain, Europe and other areas of the world. It wasn't hard to imagine an America embroiled in full-blown civil war. And so his screenplay posited a tyrannical president ordering tanks and armed soldiers onto the streets, and air strikes on his own people. POTUS – played in the movie by Nick Offerman, who so impressed as a tech leader in *DEVS* – is looking to quash the Western Forces, a rebel uprising led by an alliance between Texas and California. In all, 19 states have seceded.

'YOU WOULD NOT WANT TO MAKE A PRO-WAR MOVIE'
ALEX GARLAND

Wagner Moura as journalist Joel

Garland's way into the large-scale story is a group of four journalists – Lee, Sammy, Joel and Jessie – who track the rebel forces across the war-torn country from New York to Washington, DC as they push towards the White House. The journalists are played, respectively, by Kirsten Dunst, Stephen McKinley Henderson, Wagner Moura and Cailee Spaeny, all of whom agree that *Civil War* was one of the best scripts they'd read and quite unlike anything else. The decision was made easier still for Henderson and Spaeny by the fact they'd both starred in *DEVS*, and revered Garland. Moura, meanwhile, had read for the same show but couldn't commit when it clashed with a previously booked gig.

Dunst was the one with no previous, but had followed the English writer/director's career with admiration since he wrote *28 Days Later* and directed *Ex Machina*. She signed on the dotted line and started prepping immediately, reading books and watching *Under the Wire*, the 2018 documentary that chronicles *Sunday Times* war correspondent Marie Colvin and photographer Paul Conroy's fateful mission in Syria in 2012 to tell the story of civilians trapped in Homs and under military attack.

'As soon as I got the role, I was like, "Alex, please just send me the camera that I'm using so I can get as comfortable [with it] as I can, because people who actually shoot all the time, they hold their camera like it's a part of their body",' she says, though she admits that lockdown meant she could only shoot her husband, Jesse Plemons (who has a small but vital role in the movie), and their kids. 'That was stressing me out the most – not looking like I'm having all of this heavy gear on, and making sure that my camera seemed very natural.'

Dunst's Lee is an award-winning photojournalist who's seen it all, but never on her own soil. Also renowned is Henderson's Sammy, who's semi-retired

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The movie is akin to Alan J. Pakula's 'thoughtful thrillers' of the 70s

but can't resist the pull of these historic events. 'He *has* to be a part of it,' shrugs Henderson, a theme that Moura picks up. 'Almost all of the war correspondents that I've spoken with, the war becomes an addiction, something that they cannot live without again, which is a fucked-up, crazy thing,' he says. Moura was himself a journalist before he became an actor known for playing Pablo Escobar in *Narcos*, and earlier this year excelled as super high-risk agent 'Other John' in TV series *Mr. & Mrs. Smith*. To play Joel, he spoke with real-life war correspondents. 'The things that they go through in a war zone are so intense that when they come back home, their regular lives just stop making sense,' he explains.

As for Spaeny's Jessie, she's a talented photojournalist who's just starting out and looks to learn from Lee as they journey towards Washington. It's a bumpy ride given the chaos in the streets. 'There were definitely times in the back of the car where me and

Stephen McKinley Henderson as Sammy

Garland insisted on 'real tanks, real weapons and real jets...'

Kirsten would go flying across the seats like we were on some Disneyland rollercoaster ride,' she laughs.

'I'm a good driver, man,' shrugs Moura, who was behind the wheel in some hairy situations. 'There was a moment where I was starting to become a little concerned about it, because I was praised so many times about my driving abilities. It was like, "I'm here to act." I was looking for, "Hey, man, good scene." But most of the time, it was like, "Great driving, bro."'

Dunst and Spaeny both refer to the driving scenes as performing a play at the centre of a $50m movie (the biggest by far for both Garland and production company A24): the vehicle was rigged with multiple cameras, meaning that the four leads could perform scenes with no one in their eyeline; Garland and the sound team followed in a van. The same approach was adopted for

other scenes, whenever possible. Take the chilling sequence glimpsed in the trailers when Plemons' soldier asks the journalists, 'What kind of an American are you?' Like some modern-day Robert Altman, Garland used long lenses to avoid putting cameras in the actors' faces. They would shoot in unbroken takes, never knowing if they were the focus of the shot. It felt authentic.

'That scene's a major turning point in the film,' says Dunst. 'It's the shift in the movie where things start to get pretty gnarly.' The sequence makes for a distressing watch. But isn't it undercut for Dunst, given her husband is the source of the threat? 'No, because we fell in love first as creatives on *Fargo* [Season 2] – like, we got together a year after shooting *Fargo*. So, creatively, we respect each other so much. It's more like working with your favourite actor rather than your husband.'

Moura stresses that the tension of the confrontation was palpable. 'I totally felt it,' he winces. 'That scene is the scariest scene in the movie. It had a powerful effect on me, because I'm Brazilian. I live in America, but I always think about, "What would I do if I was driving through one of those places in the South?" I go to a gas station, and I speak with this accent, and someone is like, "Who are you? What are you doing here?"'

He takes a breath. 'What's scary about this film is it doesn't feel like *Independence Day*, like aliens coming to Washington, DC. It feels weirdly possible.'

REALITY FRIGHTS

Authenticity was key for Garland. So while the shoot was based in Atlanta and made use of green screen for the third act of the film, to augment the blocks of Washington that were constructed on set, he insisted on real tanks, real weapons and real jets. It was, to put it mildly, cacophonous.

'We shot pretty much in order, and so the last two weeks were all gunfire and explosions – it was very intense,' admits Dunst, who normally only needs a glass of wine to decompress after a stressful day's shooting. 'I mean, I can leave it mostly on the set. But I did feel a little bit of trauma going back to normal life after this. I felt out of it for a good two weeks.'

'The planes, oh my goodness, the planes,' Henderson shudders. 'And the tanks, the sound of the weaponry…' Moura takes over. 'It made the whole thing very real.' A reality that translates to the viewing experience, he says. 'The thing about this movie is, you see these wars in the Middle East and in Africa or in South America or the Ukraine. So the cognitive disruption that this film causes when you see this going on here, it's very scary.'

Q&A

Cailee Spaeny as Jessie

ACTION FIGURE

FAST-RISING STAR CAILEE SPAENY TALKS STUNTS, DUNST AND FACING A XENOMORPH IN THE UPCOMING *ALIEN: ROMULUS*...

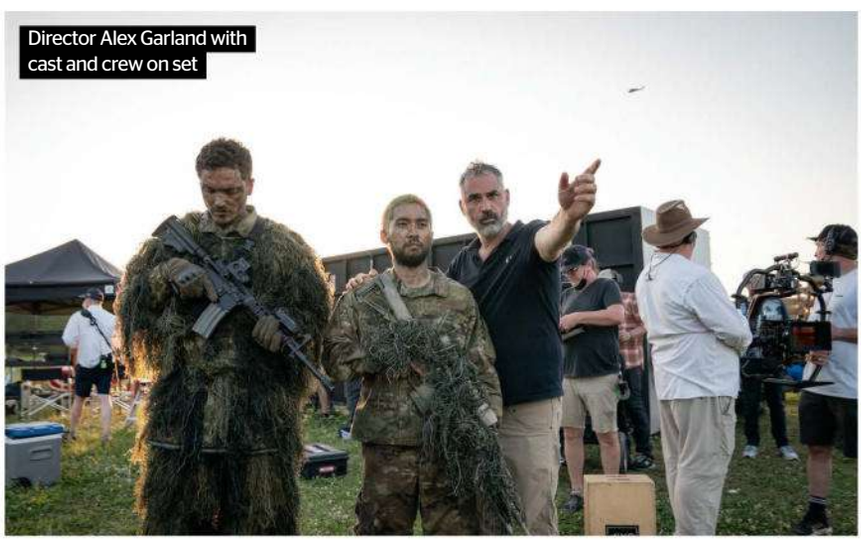
Your character in *Civil War* is a photojournalist, right?
Yeah. She's an amateur, aspiring photojournalist. She has a real talent and a real knowledge about cameras, and also love for the sort of iconic photojournalists like Don McCullin and Lee Miller. And then we find her running into her idol, Lee Smith, played by Kirsten [Dunst]. Lee becomes her mentor. There's a really beautiful passing of the torch. It's the heart of the movie, in the middle of all the action and the craziness.

Did you feel any parallels on set? Presumably you looked up to Kirsten...
It was spooky, because I did watch her in so many things growing up. She has such a career that I really look up to in terms of range and longevity. So getting to spend that time with her... She was so lovely. A lot of actors who have had those sort of careers, understandably have a guard up. And she just doesn't have that. She wears her heart on her sleeve.

Kirsten's worked with Sofia Coppola several times. You starred in *Priscilla*...
It was a sort of kismet, because I had watched her work with Sofia Coppola particularly, and then on the last day of shooting, I booked *Priscilla*. I jumped out of the car and I told her I booked the role. She burst into tears and gave me this huge hug.

You go all Tom Cruise in this film and do many of your own stunts...
I was always down to do the stunts! There's a car-to-car scene where I have to crawl from the backseat of one car into the backseat of another car. It's a very dangerous stunt. I had a blast doing that. Maybe I'm an adrenaline junkie.

Next up for you is *Alien: Romulus*. How was it facing off with a xenomorph?
We used practical effects. We had the same people who worked on *Aliens*. They came back. They were there making the xenomorph. This is a creature that they have so much love for. We had puppeteers working on the face-hugger. So to see that – it all felt so alive. I had to turn off my 'nerding out' brain, because I was just like, 'Wow, it's beautiful. Ooh, you put the Giger skull...' I had to turn that off. But it was properly scary. We set it between the first movie and the second. We were talking about, 'How could this be a child of the two?' So we have those heightened moments, but then proper horror. **JG**



Director Alex Garland with cast and crew on set

Courageously, Garland doesn't fear a backlash from US viewers who might resent an outsider having cast his gaze over the antics of the last few years and then envisaged a full-scale civil war as the imminent endpoint. He claims that he did not make allies of California and Texas to swerve accusations of a red or blue bias, but rather because a president bombing his own country goes beyond party politics, and anyone who feels otherwise… well, that says a lot.

'One of the underlying rules to my job is that you should not think about that thing you just said too much because it will stop you doing stuff,' Garland states. 'It could really stop you having an opinion, and I don't know if it's good for people who are writing novels or plays or films to remove all opinions, unless they are super-confident that the opinion is safe. That just doesn't seem like a good space for any of us to be in.'

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Eyes on the prize: a sniper takes aim

Garland is similarly dismissive of other points raised. When it's suggested that his having the White House overrun is prescient, given it was written before the mob attacked the Capitol Building on 6 January, 2021, he shrugs. 'If you just teleport yourself back, you realise it's not prescient. That is what people were worried about. So when I saw those images [on TV], I was not, at that moment, thinking about the film. I was thinking, "Oh, shit, this looks really bad."'

And what does he make of the conspiracy theory that spread after the first trailer of *Civil War* dropped – that the film is predictive programming orchestrated by a political cabal in order to prepare citizens for the real civil war that is incoming? 'I'm pretty sure you could guess what I think about it,' he sighs, pointing out he grew up before the internet and social media, and that he still gets his news from traditional sources. 'Concepts like predictive programming just never…' He sighs again. 'The BBC doesn't do a lot of stories on predictive programming. But then I imagine that someone who believes in the concept of predictive programming would say, "Well, of course that's what he would say. Nice cover story, pal."'

What Garland and his cast really want is for *Civil War* to get people talking. Too many people sit at home voicing their strident opinions; better to go to the cinema for a communal experience and discuss it with others after. It's one of the reasons that Garland compares *Civil War* to those 70s Pakula movies.

'They were called paranoid conspiracy thrillers,' he says, 'and they would tap into something real that people were feeling at that moment. You're left with something thoughtful. But they were also a great thriller with Faye Dunaway or Warren Beatty or whoever it happened to be.'

Dunst describes the shoot as 'very intense'

'IT'S LIKE A FABLE: WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU STOP TREATING EACH OTHER LIKE HUMAN BEINGS'
KIRSTEN DUNST

'Find out who you're sitting next to when you watch it,' Henderson implores. 'It's one that I truly hope that people go to the movie house to see. You know, we sit together as citizens, watch it and talk about it.'

'It's equally terrifying and mesmerising,' says Dunst. 'It's an action film, but it's also thought-provoking and it's also letting audiences reach their own conclusion about this fictional America. It's like a fable: what happens when you stop communicating with each other, and treating each other like human beings. The message is very moving for me. I feel like people will love to talk about this film in a really intense way after they've seen it. You can't get it out of your mind. It penetrates your body. Even for me, who was in the movie – after Jesse and I saw it, we were shook.' **JAMIE GRAHAM**

CIVIL WAR OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 26 APRIL.

THE TOTAL FILM INTERVIEW

INTERVIEW **ANN LEE**

‘I WAS VERY HAPPY NOT TO HAVE THE LIMELIGHT ON ME. IT’S NOT SOMETHING I’VE EVER LOOKED FOR’

MELANIE LYNSKEY

After being discovered during a high-school audition aged 15, Melanie Lynskey had been working steadily in film and TV for decades before *Yellowjackets* and *The Last of Us* supercharged her career. Now, with the release of *The Tattooist of Auschwitz*, she tells *Total Film* why she’s always found acting addictive...

PORTRAITS **BERTIE WATSON**

BERTIE WATSON/CONTOUR BY GETTY IMAGES

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Melanie Lynskey might be the nicest actor working in Hollywood. When *Total Film* catches up with the New Zealand star, her thoughtful and gentle presence feels as soothing as a light breeze on a warm day. Dressed in a pink-and-white jumper, with her hair tied back, she is video-chatting from her daughter's bedroom in Los Angeles. 'Can you see the *Encanto* bedspread?' she asks, moving out of the way to offer up a better view.

It is this sweet-natured manner that the 46-year-old has deployed to chilling effect over a decades-long career. She has always been drawn to complicated women, who are often grappling with a fierce, unwieldy torrent of emotion under a mild exterior. Lynskey can portray rage and how it shatters the soul so viscerally; it's the bee sting covered in honey, unleashed when you least expect it.

She brings an emotional intensity to each of her roles, whether it's as the baby-faced, scowling teen in Peter Jackson's *Heavenly Creatures*, who ends up murdering her own mother; or a woman, still hurting after several miscarriages, in Sam Mendes' romantic movie *Away We Go*, delivering a melancholy pole dance in front of her husband.

The past few years have been a whirlwind for Lynskey. Before that, she had established herself as a quiet force to be reckoned with in the indie world, in films such as *I Don't Feel at Home in This World Anymore*, *Hello I Must be Going* and *The Intervention*. Lynskey has also been a frequent scene-stealer in bigger productions like *Ever After*, *Shattered Glass*, *Sweet Home Alabama*, *The Informant!* and *Up in the Air*. But mainstream recognition had always eluded her until *Yellowjackets*, Showtime's gory cannibal drama. An explosive part last year as a resistance leader in HBO's *The Last of Us* only cemented her new, white-hot status.

In *The Tattooist of Auschwitz*, Sky and Peacock's adaptation of the bestselling novel, Lynskey plays real-life author Heather Morris. The aspiring writer interviews Holocaust survivor Lale Sokolov (Harvey Keitel and Jonah Hauer-King playing the older and younger versions respectively) about his incredible life story. Slowly, he reveals his moving romance with a fellow concentration-camp prisoner, Gita (Anna Próchniak).

Finding fame in her 40s, an age when many other women lament the lack of good roles in TV and film, has taken Lynskey by surprise. 'I didn't think this was going to happen in my career and I was totally fine with that,' she says. 'You go so long being like, "Well, all that stuff is meaningless to me. I don't need to make a ton of money. I don't need awards." Then there's this complicated thing where you're like, "Oh, suddenly, do I care about these nominations?"'

But Lynskey is taking it all in her stride. 'You have to just keep checking in on your actual priorities, which are your work, your heart and your self, and not let the outside noise come in.' She'd better be careful, though, because that noise is reaching a deafening crescendo.

Lynskey with co-star Kate Winslet in 1994's *Heavenly Creatures*

ALAMY

Why did you want to get involved with *The Tattooist of Auschwitz*?
It was not a book I had read. It just came out of the blue. When I read the script, I just couldn't stop reading. The story was so heartbreaking. Getting the chance to play a New Zealander seemed really fun as well. It's been so long. I just felt a little tingle. I was like, 'I think I should do this.'

What drew you to the role of Heather?
She's working in a doctor's office, she's going about her life, she has kids. But she's had this secret passion her whole life, this thing that she feels like she might be good at, but she's not sure. Then she gets this opportunity to record this survivor's testimony and write this novel, and she flourished. She says she's a different person today than she was when she started writing the book. The opportunity to tell the story of that journey, a woman in middle age discovering that she's really good at something… That was really moving to me.

How closely were you trying to imitate the real Heather Morris?
It's always a tricky thing when you're playing a real person, especially a real person who's living and can give you their opinion [laughs]. When I read the script, I was like, 'OK, she's the eyes of the audience.' There are little breaks in the storytelling where it cuts back to her and her reaction is our reaction. I wanted to show the level of care and love that Heather had during that experience with Lale, how much she helped to get the story out of him, how much she listened, how patient she was.

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The Tattooist of Auschwitz sees Lynskey play New Zealand novelist Heather Morris, pictured here with Harvey Keitel as Lale Sokolov

SKY

It's a new look for you…
I was a little surprised about the wig, initially. I got an email that said my wig fitting was at 9am and I was like, 'What wig?' They said, 'Heather has blonde hair.' Then I had this blonde bob. I never thought I could have blonde hair. There were so many swatches held up to my face to try to make it work. So there is a level of wanting her to feel represented, but not outright mimicry.

When did you fall in love with acting?
I was so shy as a kid. We moved a lot. My dad was a doctor, but when I was born, he was a medical student. So we had no money and we were just moving depending on where he was doing a residency or studying. So I was always the new kid. We had to live in London for a year. I saw at that school that they were doing a play. I was six years old. I don't know what possessed me, but I just had a feeling like, 'I should do that.' I got a tiny part. There was something about being on stage and feeling the freedom of not being myself for a minute. Suddenly I was like, 'I can be confident, I can do anything.'

'HEAVENLY CREATURES CHANGED MY LIFE FOREVER'

You landed your first film role in *Heavenly Creatures* when you were 15, at an audition at your high school. What was that experience like?
It was crazy. At the time, I thought it would be a good thing to put on my resume for drama school. I was like, 'I can say I auditioned for a movie.' I don't know why they would care about that. But I loved acting, it was all I wanted to do. Everybody said, 'That's not a real job. Don't be crazy.' It feels like a dream, when I look back on it. The audition itself was such a fun experience and then the rest of it was just… I mean, I could cry.

How did working on *Heavenly Creatures* shape you as an actor?
It's almost impossible to think who I would be and if I would be doing this for a living [without it]. It was an incredibly lucky break. Career-wise, it changed my life forever. They had people helping me learn the process of acting in a way that wasn't like a huge shock to my system. They weren't just like, 'Go in there and cry.' I had people teaching me techniques to come out of it after you've been crying all day [and] techniques to go into ways to build anger up in your body.

And then just getting to work with Peter, and seeing what he did every day. Obviously, I was working with Kate Winslet, who's one of the greatest actors of any generation ever. Having that from your very first co-star, who you're enmeshed with and working with, it's a high bar.

How did you feel about the different opportunities offered to you and Winslet after the success of *Heavenly Creatures*? Her career exploded whereas you went back to school and took a slower path to acting…
Yeah, it wasn't a surprise to me. Everybody was very cautious. Like, 'Don't get carried [away]. It's not gonna be like now you're a movie star.' It's New Zealand, people are pretty practical. I thought, 'This may never happen again.' I just tried to enjoy every moment of it. Kate already was on a trajectory that was so far beyond my little high-school-play self.

This was my first professional job. She had to explain to me what a headshot was. She was living by herself in London, doing all this television. When you meet her,

she radiates star quality. I don't think the same can be said for myself, not to do a comparison.

So it just felt natural, her progression. I remember I called her the morning she was nominated for an Oscar and she was so overwhelmed and so sweet. She was just quietly crying and [was] like, 'I can't believe it.' I was like, 'No, this is what is supposed to happen. This is the most normal thing in the world, for you to be nominated for an Oscar.'

Then you dropped out of university…
I was like, 'I've never been happier than when I was doing that movie. What if it could happen again?' Then I started chipping away, trying to climb up a ladder that already was a little inaccessible. By that point it had been shifted across the other side of the valley. I was like, 'Where's that ladder?' There was a lot of hard work. But eventually, when I started working again, it was just so joyful.

What was it like working on 1998's *Ever After* with Drew Barrymore?
So fun. We were living in the South of France together. We would all host dinner parties, have pot lucks, drink a lot of great wine and have dance parties. I learned something really big from her. I was so concerned at that time with appearing like I knew everything. So I would pretend that I understood things when I didn't. People would reference some camera thing and I'd be like, 'Oh, of course.' Drew would ask questions. She never stopped asking questions. It was so bold and smart. I was like, 'OK, that's the way to go about it.' Being confident enough to be like, 'Can you explain it to me?' From that point on, I didn't try to pretend I had all the answers any more.

***But I'm a Cheerleader*, Jamie Babbit's 1999 comedy, was ahead of the times when it came to queer representation on film. Did it feel like you were part of something groundbreaking when you were making it?**
No [laughs]. I don't think you can ever have that kind of perspective. You can feel a chemistry sometimes when you're working; you can feel when something is coming together in a way that is right and making sense. I felt like it was going to be good. And we were having so much fun when we were making it.

Was 2012 indie drama *Hello I Must Be Going* a turning point in your career?
I knew what it meant to me to get to play that part. I didn't know if anybody would see it. But I needed to do that movie. I did

FIVE STAR TURNS

HEAVENLY CREATURES 1994
Lynskey was still in high school when she began shooting her debut role in Peter Jackson's film about two Kiwi schoolgirls whose bond leads to murder. 'I knew when I read the script how good the movie would be,' she remembers.

THE INFORMANT! 2009
The actor's noughties saw her collaborate with Sam Mendes, Clint Eastwood and Jason Reitman. Yet she cites Steven Soderbergh as her 'favourite' director for the autonomy she had while playing Matt Damon's wife in his comical depiction of corporate skulduggery.

TOGETHERNESS 2015-2016
Two seasons as an unfaithful wife in the Duplass brothers' HBO dramedy left younger sibling Mark in awe of Lynskey's talent. 'Melanie has a way of intuiting interperson dynamics that is beyond me,' marvels her on-screen husband. 'It's next level.'

I DON'T FEEL AT HOME IN THIS WORLD ANYMORE 2017
Getting burgled is the final straw for Lynskey's Ruth in this vigilante comedy. 'I thought it'd be exciting to see Melanie running around in the woods,' says writer-director Macon Blair.

YELLOWJACKETS 2021-
Playing plane-crash survivor turned deceitful housewife Shauna in Showtime's thriller has brought Lynskey, now 46, a whole new audience. 'Melanie has so much depth, it's easy to believe she may carry secrets with her,' says executive producer Karyn Kusama. **NS**

E4, ALAMY

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a staged reading of it and when the reading was over, I was like, 'If somebody else does this movie, I'm gonna be in bed for a year, I'm not gonna recover.' I didn't realise until we started filming that I literally didn't have a scene off. It's like running a marathon. You just get into it. I loved that whole experience.

You're a big fan of dream work. Can you tell us how you use that to get into your roles?
It's really a way of accessing your unconscious so that the deepest parts of yourself are more available to you. You ask yourself for dreams for specific roles. Things will come up in the dream that you can sift and work through. But over time you get little tricks for getting into an unconscious part of yourself while you're at work. You learn actively how to do that on a busy set. You learn to be able to drop into yourself and take the time for yourself in a way that is quite easy and accessible. It's just been life-changing. I've never done any other kind of acting training, so I don't have much to compare it to. But for me, it works so well.

You've described yourself as a 'shy person' who doesn't have a 'big resonant voice'. Did acting help you develop your voice?
Yeah, I definitely think it helped me. I feel really lucky to have found an outlet at such a young age where I can process my emotions and learn to have more of a voice. I remember years ago, a therapist said to me, 'I wish you could advocate for yourself like you can advocate for your characters.' Because I can be quite bossy at work. If I don't think something is right instinctively, I'll fight back. I'll say, 'Let's work on this.' I always try to be collaborative with everyone. I don't want to be a dick about it.

But in real life [it] used to be a lot easier for me to be pushed around. I would feel, 'This isn't right. I don't want this.' But I couldn't speak up for myself. I've gotten a lot better about doing that. It's partly acting and working and partly my husband, [actor Jason Ritter, who] has been great.

What do you enjoy the most about playing Shauna in *Yellowjackets*?
When I read a script, every episode there's something I'm terrified of and also excited about. Something where I'm like, 'Oh my God, really?' But then it's so fun to actually do it. There's so much within that character. She's so different from me. She's such an interesting, repressed person to play, who has so much of an undercurrent, where you don't quite know what's happening beneath. I feel in every scene, there's this bubbling brook in my head and in my heart that could spill out.

What's happening with Season 3?
I don't know. I'm going to an event that some of the showrunners are going to be at. My agent was like, 'Ask when Season 3 starts!' I'm like, 'OK.' I do want to know. I'm really curious. I don't know what the plan is. I have full trust at this point. So we'll just see what happens.

What do you remember the most about the shoot for *The Last of Us*, in which you played revolutionary leader Kathleen Coghlan?
I remember just how meticulous the set design was. I've never in my life been part of a project that felt so overwhelming. Like the cul-de-sac we were shooting in, you could have shot in any one of those houses. The level of detail was so incredible. I was stunned by it. It really felt like being put down in the middle of the video game. All of the zombies rushing at me were circus performers and stunt performers who had been training for five weeks to get the sequence right.

'EVERY EPISODE THERE'S SOMETHING I'M TERRIFIED OF'

You are very good at portraying the rage within your characters on screen. Why do you think you are drawn to those kinds of roles?
You know, for a long time, I was not good at it. I remember, on *Hello I Must be Going*, there were a couple of moments where I had to be really enraged and they were the hardest moments of the shoot.

Then, when I broke up with my first husband, I did a lot of very intensive therapy. There was this one day where the therapist had me use a rubber baseball bat to hit this big brick.

I was afraid, even at work, that I would start to feel angry and I would never stop feeling angry. I think a lot of women probably have this feeling. We are so used to being like, 'It's OK. Let me just push that down.' I started crying. It was this incredibly cathartic moment. It was the beginning of me understanding that it is something that I have control over and an important part of being a human being. Women are just not encouraged to show it.

So then I found myself after that drawn to women who were letting themselves feel it. I just felt this freedom suddenly within myself to play with the rage that I had, knowing that I wouldn't try to burn the studio down [laughs].

MELANIE LYNSKEY IN NUMBERS

3
Emmy nominations for *Yellowjackets* and *The Last of Us*

$180,622,424
The box-office take of Lynskey's highest-grossing film, *Sweet Home Alabama*

50
The number of actors Lynskey beat out for the role of Colleen in Tim Blake Nelson's *Leaves of Grass*

15
Lynskey's age when cast in *Heavenly Creatures*

63
Episodes of *Two and a Half Men* in which she appeared, over 12 years

You've spent a lot of your career in supporting roles and became a lead actor later in life. Were you frustrated at the time or happy not to have the limelight on you?
I was very happy not to have the limelight on me. It's not something I've ever looked for. My ideal situation as an actor is being able to work consistently and be challenged and excited. But then also go to Home Depot – that's where I went yesterday – freely, which I can still do. Honestly, I had a big, long stretch where, yes, I was finishing high school and university, but I wasn't working. So every job I was immensely grateful for, and also had this feeling in the back of my mind, which has still not gone away, 'Is this going to be my last job? Is this it? Is it over now?' So I was just trying to enjoy it in case it was the last job that ever happened. There's something about coming in as a supporting character – it's a lot easier than carrying something, there's a lot less pressure.

'I WAS TRYING TO ENJOY [EVERY JOB] IN CASE IT WAS THE LAST'

Do you feel like the film industry has turned its back on you when it comes to lead roles compared to TV, which hasn't?
Before *Yellowjackets*, I was getting so many interesting lead roles in independent movies. So to me, that's the most interesting place to work, with the most freedom. I never had an idea of myself as being the lead in studio movies. That's never happened for me. I don't know what the requirements are [laughs]. But that's not something that I'm like, 'Oh, that's coming any day now.' I felt really satisfied with the work I was getting.

Are there any roles that you've missed out on that you're still sad about?
One of the greatest feelings as an actor is to see the movie that you didn't get and realise, 'Oh, that was not my job.' I remember I was up for *Junebug* [2005 comedy drama directed by Phil Morrison]. I wanted that movie so badly. It was such a beautiful script. I was just devastated. When I saw Amy Adams in that movie, it was like a weight was lifted from my shoulders. I was like, 'That was never my job to cry about. It was always hers.' Of course there are things you're disappointed

BERTIE WATSON/CONTOUR BY GETTY IMAGES

about. But usually that's the thing that happens, where you see someone just absolutely kill it.

You wrote a very touching tribute to Julian Sands, your *Rose Red* co-star who died last year. What's your favourite memory of working with him?
What a lovely guy. I think just hanging out in my trailer while I listened to rap music, and seeing Julian Sands sitting on the floor. It was an interesting one because there were a lot of special effects happening. We did not have a ton to do as actors. It was a long shoot. There was just so much giggling and hanging out and sitting in my trailer chatting.

What was it like having a recurring role in *Two and a Half Men* between 2003 and 2015? That's a long period of time.
I was incredibly grateful for it. It wasn't like the amounts of money that Charlie [Sheen] was making, or any of the men on the show. It was a modest amount. But it was enough for me. If I did three episodes of the show, I could pay my mortgage for the year and my bills. So it freed me up to be able to do all the independent movies that I did, which was the way my career [was] really built. I got [TV drama series] *Togetherness* because Jay Duplass saw *Hello I Must Be Going* and then from *Togetherness*, everything changed. So I was incredibly grateful to the show for giving me financial freedom and letting me have that contract where I could come and go.

And performing in front of a live audience must have been fun…
It's like the biggest rush of adrenaline. I've never done theatre other than in high school, so that's the only time I've gotten to have moments like that and it feels incredible. I understand why people want to do plays all the time.

You've worked with filmmakers like Sam Mendes, Clint Eastwood and Steven Soderbergh. Which director has taught you the most?

As Kathleen in post-apoc thriller *The Last of Us*

I think my favourite director of everyone I've worked with was Steven Soderbergh. It was so loose. It just felt like anything was possible. It felt like we had all the time in the world, but it moved very quickly. He had so much trust in what we were doing, and you just feel like you're capable of anything in those moments.

What role would you like to play that you haven't yet?
There are people that I want to work with. I don't ever have ideas of a particular kind of role that I want to do. When I read it, I know instinctively. But yeah, there's a collection of actors in my head. Brian Tyree Henry, everybody knows he's my favourite actor. Sam Rockwell, I would love to work with. Murray Bartlett is a big one. J. Smith-Cameron and I saw each other at Fashion Week. She was like, 'Wouldn't it be fun to do something together?' I was like, 'Yes!' Greta Lee had one scene in *Hello I Must Be Going* and I became obsessed with her after that. To work with Greta [again] would be [amazing].

In your obituary, which film or television show would you most like to be remembered for?
I want every actor to answer this question. Like, what would Cate Blanchett say? I feel like I'm kind of torn between like *Togetherness*, *Hello I Must Be Going*, *I Don't Feel at Home in This World Anymore* and *Yellowjackets*. [I'll] pick *Togetherness*. Sorry, *Yellowjackets*. It was a combination of all the things I love the most in acting – there was a lot of improv, a lot of freedom. I loved that character. I loved getting to work with Amanda Peet. Jay and Mark are geniuses. Because it was cancelled so abruptly, I never got the chance to see it to its completion. So there's still a little part of my heart that's yearning.

THE TATTOOIST OF AUSCHWITZ IS ON SKY ATLANTIC AND NOW FROM 2 MAY.

MELANIE LYNSKEY LINE READING

'THE NEXT TIME I WRITE IN THIS DIARY, MOTHER WILL BE DEAD. HOW ODD… YET HOW PLEASING'
PAULINE PARKER
HEAVENLY CREATURES

'[I want] for people not to be assholes'
RUTH
I DON'T FEEL AT HOME IN THIS WORLD ANYMORE

'HAVE YOU EVER PEELED THE SKIN OFF A HUMAN CORPSE? IT'S NOT AS EASY AS YOU MIGHT THINK'
SHAUNA
YELLOWJACKETS

ALAMY

EDITED BY
MATTHEW LEYLAND
@TOTALFILM_MATTL

★★★★★
MAY BREAK YOU

★★★★½
HARD-HITTING

★★★½★
HAS A GO

★★★★★
WIDE OF THE TARGET

★★★★★
NOT WORTH IT

SCREE

THE WORLD'S MOST TRUSTED MOVIE

74

ROAD HOUSE
Does Jake Gyllenhaal have a smash on his hands?

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ALSO RELEASED

We couldn't see them in time for this issue, so head to gamesradar.com/totalfilm for reviews of the following:

TITLE	RELEASE DATE
Abigail	19 April
Back to Black	12 April
Civil War	12 April
The First Omen	5 April
Ghostbusters: Frozen Empire	Out now
Godzilla x Kong: The New Empire	29 March
Immaculate	Out now
Monkey Man	5 April
Seize Them!	5 April

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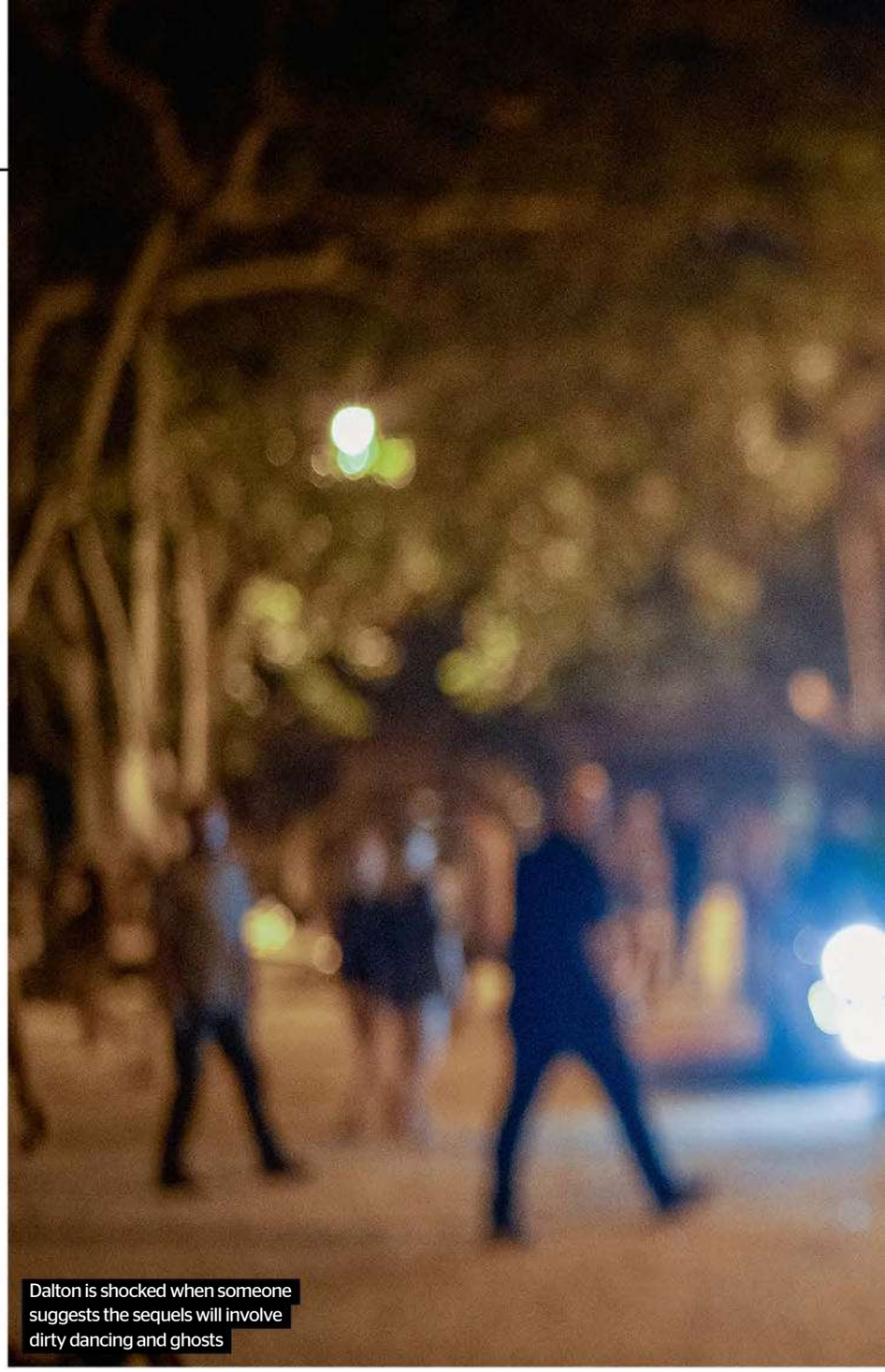
ROAD HOUSE TBC

Scars and bars...

★★★☆☆ **OUT NOW** PRIME VIDEO



Dalton is shocked when someone suggests the sequels will involve dirty dancing and ghosts

DIRECTOR Doug Liman **STARRING** Jake Gyllenhaal, Conor McGregor, Jessica Williams, Daniela Melchior, Billy Magnussen **SCREENPLAY** Anthony Bagarozzi, Chuck Mondry **DISTRIBUTOR** Prime Video **RUNNING TIME** 114 mins

At one point in Doug Liman's remake of the 1989 Patrick Swayze punch-up, the muscle-bound Dalton (Jake Gyllenhaal) growls: 'No one ever wins a fight.' Well, that's not quite true in a bruising, bone-shattering blockbuster that updates the original with some sunny locations and the movie debut of Irish UFC fighter Conor McGregor.

Getting back into the same square-jawed shape he managed for *Southpaw* (2015), Gyllenhaal's Dalton is a moody ex-UFC fighter haunted by his past. Sleeping in a car and without even a mobile phone to his name, he's at rock bottom – until, that is, bar owner Frankie (Jessica Williams) implores him to come down to her joint in the Florida Keys to clean up the scum and villainy that is currently ruining her business.

After a near-death encounter with a train, Dalton takes a Greyhound to the Sunshine State – arriving with a suitcase on wheels, bizarrely – and he's soon donning a floral shirt and showing just how handy he is with his fists. An early encounter with some goons is particularly amusing: after beating them all to a pulp, he then generously drives them all to the nearest hospital.

Indeed, for a film that isn't exactly the most sophisticated work you'll see this year, Anthony Bagarozzi and Chuck Mondry's script comes blessed with some funny lines: 'What are you whittling?' says one brute to another, as he carves out some wood with a knife. 'A stick,' comes the reply. 'What's it gonna be?' says the first thug. 'A smaller stick.' It's a random exchange, but an enjoyable one.

Though this remake was produced by action veteran Joel Silver, who was also behind the original, it has been updated considerably. Gone is the grimy honky-tonk bar in Missouri, replaced by a more upmarket watering hole. Likewise, the sexist portrayal of women and casual nudity has largely been banished, even if the plot's basic template has been retained.

This time, Dalton finds a home on a leaky houseboat, not a farm. Meanwhile, transposing the story to Florida, with its beautiful aquamarine coastal views, gives the film a more arresting visual palette than its predecessor. It also allows Liman (*The Bourne Identity*, *American Made*) and his writers to set up plenty of action on the water, including one neat moment when the film's wild-eyed villain, Ben Brandt (Billy Magnussen, amusingly OTT), is being shaved on the deck of a catamaran by a very nervous barber.

Road House really picks up when hired hand Knox (McGregor) arrives, in one of the most arresting entrances you'll ever see – naked, walking through a market, causing havoc. Quite an introduction. Hired by Brandt's incarcerated father, who feels his son isn't running his empire well enough, this tattooed, bearded monster – sporting a pair of purple trousers when

PRIME VIDEO

SEE THIS IF YOU LIKED

ROAD HOUSE 1989
Swayze is effortlessly cool as fists fly and the Jeff Healey Band rips up the stage.

FIGHT CLUB 1999
The bare-knuckle bouts still hit hard in David Fincher's takedown of consumer capitalism.

SOUTHPAW 2015
Gyllenhaal gets ripped as the troubled champ in Antoine Fuqua's enjoyable boxing drama.

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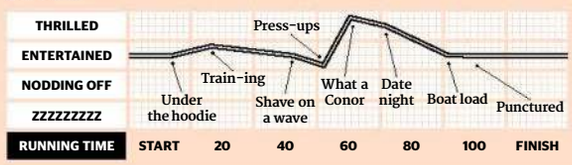

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he finds some clothes – is soon on Dalton's tail. Despite his lack of previous screen experience, McGregor is charismatic enough to go up against Gyllenhaal. He's funny, too, picking up a golf club at one point and yelling, 'Been a while since I've been clubbing!' as he takes out multiple opponents.

Sadly, Liman's *Road House* doesn't have the same easygoing vibe as the original (much of which was down to Swayze's laconic turn). Instead, it relies on some big-scale stunts. Some are impressive, like the moment Dalton is scooped up in the back of a pick-up and thrown over the side of a bridge and into the water below. There's also some major speedboat action, which Liman orchestrates with real aplomb.

Unfortunately, the film's connective tissue isn't that engaging. Dalton befriends the owners of a local book store under threat, including youngster Charlie (Hannah Lanier), but it's hardly thrilling. Likewise, his relationship with local medic Ellie (Daniela Melchior) – echoing a plotline from the 1989 film – doesn't exactly set the pulse racing, even with her character's connection to the villains.

From *End of Watch* to *Ambulance* and *The Covenant*, Gyllenhaal has frequently proved how good he is in action movies, and he's typically watchable as the 'world's most notorious fighter'. It's just a shame the script is as robust as soggy tissue paper; Brandt's desire to shut down Frankie's bar is anything but compelling, while Dalton's traumatic backstory lacks any emotional heft.

In the end, *Road House* is a solid actioner, a frolic that Liman marshals competently. This is a fun Friday-night fight-fest, best enjoyed with a few bevvies – brash, loud, knockabout and liable to leave you with a cauliflower ear or two. **JAMES MOTTRAM**

'*Road House* really picks up when hired hand Knox arrives, in one of the most arresting entrances you'll ever see – naked, walking through a market, causing havoc'

THE VERDICT *Road House* 2024 misses the grungy vibe of the original, and the plot is bang average, but Gyllenhaal rocks and McGregor's presence has bite.

Missing out on the lunchtime special hit Anne hard

MOTHERS' INSTINCT 15

Parental fights...

★★★★★ **OUT NOW** CINEMAS

If you enjoyed Anne Hathaway leaning into a Hitchcock antihero vibe in last year's *Eileen*, you'll be pleased to hear that this handsome take on Barbara Abel's novel (previously adapted by Olivier Masset-Depasse in 2018) promises more of the same.

Hathaway plays Céline, the ostensibly perfectly poised wife to a *Mad Men*-type hubby (Josh Charles) in early-60s New York. The couple and their beloved son Max are a mirror to the family next door: peroxide Alice (Jessica Chastain, who also produces), her dismissive spouse (Anders Danielsen Lie), and little boy Theo. The two women are coiffured besties – Céline supporting Alice's desire to return to work, Alice planning surprise parties for her friend. But when a fatal accident brings grief to the door of the neighbours, resentment, suspicion, jealousy, mental-health issues and murderous intent threaten to sully the pristine white gloves of the women of the households.

The directorial debut of cinematographer Benoît Delhomme, *Mothers' Instinct* is gorgeously period-accurate and Sirkian in its dramatic beats. It also skilfully allows the audience to weigh up which of the women is a real threat as they accuse each other of unhinged acts, spiralling towards a dark denouement. Both Chastain and Hathaway flutter beautifully between composure and mania within a pulpy structure that questions gaslighting, patriarchal expectation, postnatal depression, gender roles and the special cruelty of frenemies. **JANE CROWTHER**

THE VERDICT Glossy and entertaining, this may not surprise but its beats are as deftly executed as the ladies' cocktails.

EVIL DOES NOT EXIST TBC

There's something in the air...

★★★★★ **OUT 5 APRIL** CINEMAS

With its unhurried pacing, enveloping tranquillity, disruptive stylistic quirks and opaque ending, Ryusuke Hamaguchi's follow-up to his universally acclaimed *Drive My Car* (2021) is likely to be a more divisive affair. Tune in to its wavelength, though, and it mesmerises as much as it mystifies.

A tale of corporate greed, *Evil Does Not Exist* sees an Edenic village located a short drive from Tokyo threatened by a corporation's plans to construct a glamping site. Takumi (Hitoshi Omika) represents the villagers' concerns, while talent agency PRs Takahashi (Ryuji Kosaka) and Mayuzumi (Ayaka Shibutani) speak for the money-grabbing execs who can't even be bothered to show their faces.

But what seems to be a cut-and-dried eco-fable about the evils of capitalism slowly reveals itself to be something altogether more complex and perplexing. Characters reveal unexpected layers; the narrative refuses signposted paths. And the realist drama is infused with a sense of the uncanny – at times, Hamaguchi's enigmatic film teeters on the edge of full-on folk-horror territory.

As the drifting camera repeatedly gazes up at the sky through grasping treetops, and the score jarringly cuts to silence again and again, questions will burble in your mind like the spring water that's so precious to the village. Just don't expect the answers to be equally crystal clear. **JAMIE GRAHAM**

THE VERDICT Watching Hamaguchi's measured drama is like escaping the city for pure air. Breathe in its secrets.

Is it a bird? Is it a plane? No, it's evil capitalists come to destroy your village

STUDIOCANAL, MODERN FILMS, METFILM, BFI, CONIC, ICON, IN 2

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Cynthia Erivo plays refugee Jacqueline, haunted by her memories

DRIFT 15

Escape from the past...

★★★★★ **OUT 29 MARCH** CINEMAS

Every refugee has a story, and it's often one laced with trauma and heartbreak. Such is the case with Jacqueline (Cynthia Erivo), a woman born into wealth and privilege in her native Liberia, who's gone from a comfortable life in England to one of homeless instability on a sun-soaked Greek island populated by vacationers.

It must have taken something harrowing to bring about such a seismic reversal of fortune and Singaporean director Anthony Chen duly parcels out the details in periodic flashbacks over the course of his English-language debut. Even without them, though, one would intuit its essence from Erivo's nervy, haunted demeanour and a guard that only lowers when a kindly tour guide (Alia Shawkat) takes an interest in her wellbeing.

Educated, erudite and equipped with a flawless English accent, Jacqueline hardly fits the tabloid stereotype of an émigré fleeing violence and persecution. Then again, that may well be the point of Chen's sensitive adaptation of Alexander Maksik's 2013 novel *A Marker to Measure Drift*: that every displacement tale is different and that one generalises at one's peril. You could argue its hero has it better than, say, the kids from *Io Capitano*, even if she does live on pilfered sugar sachets and sleep in a cave. When the sun sets, though, who'd want her nightmares? **NEIL SMITH**

THE VERDICT A moving performance from Erivo ensures this considered migrant drama is worth sticking with.

SILVER HAZE 15

★★★☆☆ **OUT 29 MARCH** CINEMAS

This latest collaboration between Dutch writer/director Sacha Polak and British non-professional actor Vicky Knight is an empathetic character study that draws on the latter's real-life experiences. Physically and emotionally scarred from surviving a childhood fire, 20-something Dagenham nurse Franky (Knight) falls for the psychologically troubled Florence (Esmé Creed-Miles). Shot with a strong visual feeling for its characters' changing moods, *Silver Haze* sometimes struggles to weave together its various narrative strands, though Knight's performance is compelling throughout. **TOM DAWSON**

IF ONLY I COULD HIBERNATE TBC

★★★★☆ **OUT 19 APRIL** CINEMAS

The feature debut from Mongolian director Zoljargal Purevdash is an affecting story of hope amid hardship, mounted with empathy against a backdrop of poverty and pollution. Sharing a yurt with his family, teenager Ulzii (Battsooj Uurtsaikh) has ambitions to improve his lot through study. When his mother moves away, Ulzii stays with his younger siblings, yet becomes torn between school and the need to provide the basics – warmth, food. Redundant subplot about a kindly teacher aside, this emerges as a tender, lived-in portrait of dreams and despair. **KEVIN HARLEY**

BLEEDING LOVE 15

★★★☆☆ **OUT 12 APRIL** CINEMAS

Starring real-life father and daughter Ewan and Clara McGregor as an estranged father and daughter called, helpfully, Father and Daughter, Emma Westerberg's debut is an American road movie with family relationships at its core and a drifty, almost ambivalent tone. Originally called *You Sing Loud, I Sing Louder*, it's an indulgent affair that relies heavily on the off-screen bond between its leads, gradually building towards a moving conclusion. Still, the best moments feel unscripted, like the pair's joyful rendition of the eponymous Leona Lewis song. **MATT GLASBY**

JEANNE DU BARRY 15

★★☆☆☆ **OUT 19 APRIL** CINEMAS

If your idea of fun is watching a waxen, pompadoured Johnny Depp strut around while speaking in halting French, then this ponderous historical drama about Louis XV's favourite mistress may be one for you. Everyone else will doubtless be as disdainful as the 18th-century king's (Depp) family were of the biopic's eponymous courtesan, for all the lubricious gusto that Maïwenn (who also directs) brings to the role. Fabulous to look at, yet deathly dull to sit through, it's a lumpen two hours very much in need of an editorial guillotine. **NEIL SMITH**

KUNG FU PANDA 4 PG

Po things...

★★★☆☆ **OUT 28 MARCH** CINEMAS

It's been eight years since we last saw Po, the adorkable panda with a penchant for martial arts, on the big screen. And it's been 16 years since the franchise (one of DreamWorks Animation's most resilient) debuted. But while Po is at the peak of his spiritual mastery, and on the lookout for a new Dragon Warrior to succeed him, there's no grand reinvention of the material here. Instead, this is an amiable retread of the series' tried-and-trusted formula.

Fellow masters the Furious Five are absent this time, making way for a streamlined buddy pairing between Jack Black's Po and corsac fox thief Zhen (Awkwafina). Meanwhile, the new villain is The Chameleon (an enjoyably menacing Viola Davis), who can absorb others' powers. Her ability to transform into formerly vanquished foes gives this fourquel a greatest-hits quality (though of the former baddies, only Ian McShane returns vocally).

Black and Awkwafina are as effortlessly funny as ever (and James Hong and Bryan Cranston are another good-value pairing as Po's dads), while the somewhat conventional journey is never too far away from another zippily choreographed fight scene. *KFP4* doesn't push any visual/narrative boundaries in the way its DWA stablemate *Puss in Boots: The Last Wish* did. Still, it's another breezy adventure that comfortably delivers on the necessary physical comedy and cartoony martial arts.

MATT MAYTUM

THE VERDICT Jack Black and Awkwafina are a fun pairing in a sprightly sequel that never leaves its comfort zone.

OUR SON 15

★★★☆☆ **OUT NOW** DIGITAL

Affecting turns from Luke Evans and Billy Porter as two fathers battling for custody over their eight-year-old son elevate Bill Oliver's otherwise workaday drama. From the moment Porter's stay-at-home dad Gabriel files for divorce from Evans' workaholic Nicky, *Our Son* dutifully hits a string of familiar emotional beats – as if its cinematically uncommon scenario were enough to set it apart from its genre peers. Yet the two leads locate hidden depths in their respective archetypes – enough, perhaps, to wring an unlikely tear or two.

CHRIS SCHILLING

ALL YOU NEED IS DEATH 15

★★★☆☆ **OUT 19 APRIL** CINEMAS

Rich in atmosphere and mythology, this offbeat effort from Irish writer-director Paul Duane (*Very Extremely Dangerous*) is a literal folk horror. Protagonists Anna (Simone Collins) and Aleks (Charlie Maher) tour rural Ireland, collecting old songs that have been passed down through the ages, to sell on to a mysterious organisation. But when they hear a tune by elderly recluse Rita (Olwen Fouéré), sung in 'whatever it was that came before Irish', dark forces are unleashed… Budgetary limitations aside, the film weaves an impressively uneasy spell. **MATT GLASBY**

PET SEMATARY: BLOODLINES 15

★★☆☆☆ **OUT NOW**

DVD, BD, DIGITAL, PARAMOUNT+

EXTRAS ★★☆☆☆ Featurettes

If there's one truism about Stephen King adaptations, it's that no matter how bad one may be, there's always scope for an even worse follow-up. Although this Paramount+ prequel to the 2019 *Pet Sematary* do-over is no *The Mangler Reborn* (at the very least, *Bloodlines* is competently made), it's continually undermined by a clunky script full of tired tropes and stock characters. After four films, none of which has lived up to King's harrowing novel, it's high time Hollywood let this franchise rest in peace. **ANTON VAN BEEK**

SWEDE CAROLINE 15

★★☆☆☆ **OUT 19 APRIL** CINEMAS

There are slim comedic pickings in this British mockumentary about competitive vegetable growers, for all the plucky charm that Jo Hartley (*This Is England*) lends to her titular role as an amateur gardener whose hopes of taking on the professionals are cruelly squashed. Not to be outdone, Caroline plants a mega-marrow, only to see her greenhouse raided: the cue for a somewhat strained farce in which a couple of private investigators (Aisling Bea and Ray Fearon) with a taste for bondage-based sex parties add an unnecessary element of crudité.

NEIL SMITH

BLUE FINCH, CONIC, PARAMOUNT, PICNIC, UNIVERSAL, VERTIGO

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DISCO BOY TBC

A new talent takes to the floor...

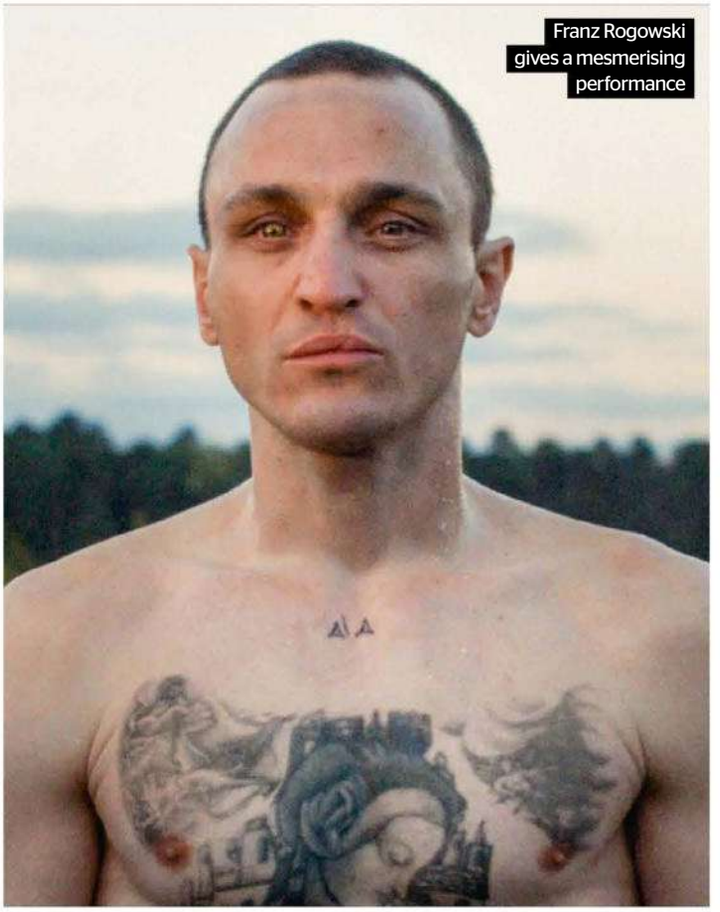
★★★★★ **OUT 29 MARCH** CINEMAS

An oblique reflection on identity, colonialism and undocumented migration, this heady, sometimes hallucinogenic feature debut from France-based Italian director Giacomo Abbruzzese will frustrate some with its tantalising mirror images, cosmic coincidences and untied narrative threads. Give yourself up to its rhythms, though, and you'll be lost in a trance.

Travelling into Poland for a football match, Belarusians Aleksei (*Passages*' Franz Rogowski) and Mikhail (Michal Balicki) make a break for France, where Aleksei joins the French Foreign Legion. Meanwhile, in Nigeria, Jomo (Morr Ndiaye) leads an insurgent paramilitary group. The paths of Jomo and Aleksei cross when members of the French Foreign Legion go on an infiltration mission in the Niger Delta to free French hostages. Their coming together, shot in infrared night vision like a disco dance of death, sets off strange ripples of behaviour in Aleksei, a breakdown of sorts that's empowering and liberating.

Throughout, Rogowski is a hypnotic presence. His features are resolute as he undergoes rigorous training, then opaque as he trawls the clubs of Paris upon returning, hollowed and haunted, from the Niger Delta. There's a sensuality to the German actor that chimes with DoP Hélène Louvart's luminous images and French DJ Vitalic's pulsing electronic score, as Abbruzzese openly invites comparisons to Claire Denis' shimmering French Legionnaire classic, *Beau Travail* (1999). Fascinating. **JAMIE GRAHAM**

THE VERDICT Abbruzzese's talent blazes like a neon strobe light, his elliptical debut throwing new, throbbing shapes.



Franz Rogowski gives a mesmerising performance

Rey of hope: Daisy Ridley stars as Fran

SOMETIMES I THINK ABOUT DYING TBC

The quirks of being a wallflower...

★★★☆☆ **OUT 19 APRIL** CINEMAS

Fran (Daisy Ridley) has a secret obsession: her own death. The socially awkward office worker's imagination is swamped with suicidal ideations involving slithering pythons, car crashes and ants crawling busily over sallow skin.

As grim as these fantasies may be, they are a lot more vivid than her bleak reality: a life spent shuffling paperwork in a shabby workplace sited somewhere on the dreary Oregon coast. But then she meets Robert (Dave Merheje), an affable new colleague who makes it his mission to pop her bubble of isolation.

A Sundance indie tuned to a deliberately muted key, Rachel Lambert's quiet romance is a symphony of uncomfortable silences that requires producer/star Ridley to hide her light beneath the thickest of bushels. Its charm lies in watching Fran slowly blossom under Robert's attentive ministrations, a nervous night at the pictures (followed by pie) paving the way for a subsequent murder party at which she reveals a flair for ghoulish storytelling.

Given that the 2019 short it's expanded from ran a mere 12 minutes, there's a definite sense here of material being extended beyond its elasticity. Yet it's a decent vehicle for Ridley that, like last year's *The Marsh King's Daughter*, shows that she doesn't need a galaxy far, far away to demonstrate her star (*Wars*) power. **NEIL SMITH**

THE VERDICT There's more to life than death in this affecting portrait of a morbid lonely soul.

Gareth Southgate's successor is finally unveiled...

THE BEAUTIFUL GAME 12

Up for the cup...

★★★☆☆ **OUT NOW** CINEMAS **29 MARCH** NETFLIX

A dash of panache, please!' requests England manager Mal (Bill Nighy) of his ragtag team of players as they arrive at the Homeless World Cup, a real-life competition for the internationally unhoused that provides the backdrop for Thea Sharrock's (*Wicked Little Letters*) otherwise fictional yarn.

Panache, in truth, is somewhat wanting in this story of disadvantaged misfits finding hope and self-worth in four-a-side street soccer. But there's plenty of heart and humour to make up for it, not to mention postcard-perfect images of the Eternal City that bring to mind Audrey Hepburn's glorious *Roman Holiday*.

All roads do indeed lead to Rome for Mal's recruits, which include an ex-gambler goalie (Tom Vaughan-Lawlor), a recovering heroin addict (Callum Scott Howells) and a gifted striker living in his car (Micheal Ward). It's the latter's redemptive arc that takes centre stage here, a decision that takes full advantage of Ward's star charisma. Yet it's one that rather short-changes the rest of his squad, some of whom (Robin Nazari's Syrian refugee, for example) hardly get a look-in.

Tangential narratives involving the Japanese, South African and US participants contribute to a crowded affair that only attains dramatic clarity on the pitch. Like the tournament itself, though, this remains a noble and well-intentioned endeavour that builds to a rewarding crescendo. **NEIL SMITH**

THE VERDICT Though Messi in parts, this feel-good football fable still serves up a significant emotional kick.

THE ORIGIN OF EVIL 15

Rich pickings...

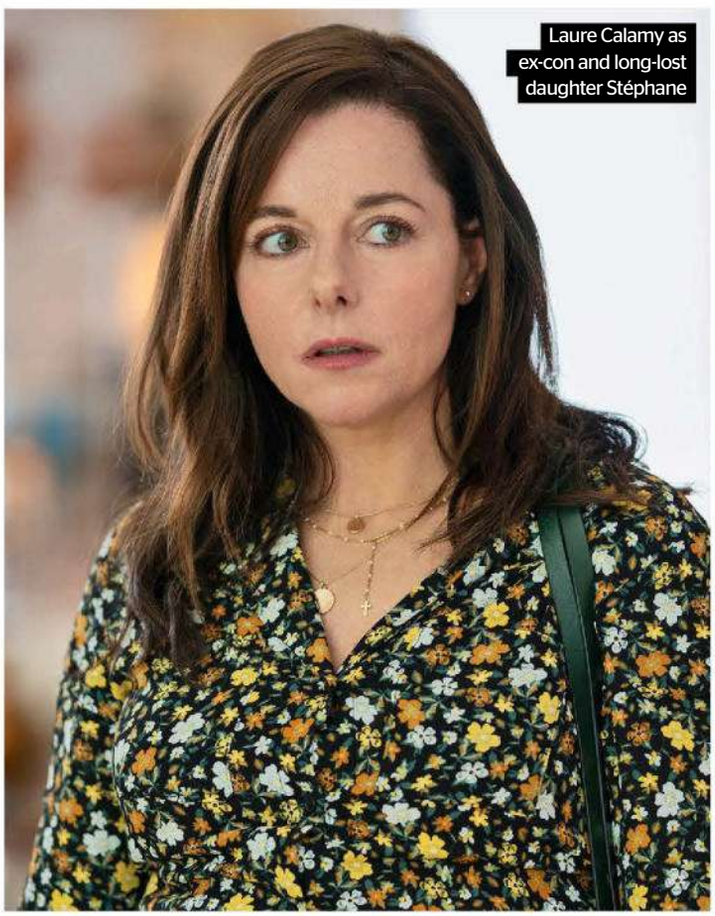
★★★★☆ **OUT 29 MARCH** CINEMAS

It's less 'Who's your Daddy?' than 'Who's your daughter?' in this sharp-toothed and twisty French thriller about a long-lost offspring seeking paternal love (and maybe loot) within a dysfunctional hotel dynasty.

Laure Calamy (*Call My Agent!*) is deliciously demure as broke, lonely ex-con Stéphane, keen to cosy up to ailing biological father Serge (Jacques Weber), the creepiest tycoon on the Côte d'Azur. Director Sébastien Marnier gets us rooting for Stéphane as Serge's ruthless younger daughter (Doria Tillier) and his shopaholic wife Louise (Dominique Blanc, oozing Almodóvar-ish camp) try and oust her from their crazy, crammed mansion. Despite its hate-the-rich comic touches – see also *Saltburn* and *Parasite* – the film is an edgy little number, full of tension and jeopardy as Stéphane wriggles between her hateful new family and a volatile, violent jailbird girlfriend (Suzanne Clément).

Clever changes in the film's colour palette emphasise Stéphane's plight, pinballing her between her no-hoper life in a faded-out fish-packing factory and Serge's tropically hued chateau. Marnier also wraps the corkscrew plot in nice retro styling, cranking up the suspense with Brian De Palma-influenced split-screen scenes, and throwing in some Claude Chabrol-like backstabbing and betrayals. Calamy gives a superb, protean performance, constantly keeping us guessing as to whether Stéphane is needy, seedy or just plain greedy. **KATE STABLES**

THE VERDICT This sharply wicked Riviera-set thriller mixes the poignant and the poisonous with real style.


Laure Calamy as ex-con and long-lost daughter Stéphane

NETFLIX, BLUE FINCH, PARKLAND, SIGNATURE, OURZON

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CONCRETE UTOPIA 15

★★★★★ **OUT 1 APRIL** DIGITAL

This predecessor to Netflix hit *Badland Hunters* arrives only a few months after the post-apocalyptic original, though it isn't being released by the streamer. Thankfully, that curious distribution situation is no reflection on the film's quality. A slick hybrid of *High-Rise* and *Lost*, Um Tae-hwa's thriller follows survivors of a cataclysmic earthquake in Seoul as they form an isolationist community in the only apartment complex that evaded destruction. Offering acute insight into how authoritarianism can burgeon in crises, it's a riveting spin on the disaster-movie template. **JOSH SLATER-WILLIAMS**

THE TROUBLE WITH JESSICA 15

★★★★★ **OUT 5 APRIL** CINEMAS

Getting shot of a corpse, as the cast of Hitchcock's *The Trouble with Harry* (1955) discovered, can be a trying business even if you're not in the middle of a make-or-break house sale. Luckily, Sarah (Shirley Henderson) and husband Tom (Alan Tudyk) have Beth (Olivia Williams) and Richard (Rufus Sewell) to help them dispose of author Jessica (Indira Varma) when she inconveniently hangs herself in their garden. Matt Winn's farce is an amusingly caustic affair, played with zest. On the subject of suicide, though, it's perturbingly flippant. **NEIL SMITH**

BLACK FLIES TBC

★★★★★ **OUT 19 APRIL** PRIME VIDEO

A rookie and a veteran team up in this grim-vibes New York paramedic drama from Jean-Stéphane Sauvaire (2008's *Johnny Mad Dog*). Tye Sheridan is Ollie Cross, the new kid on the block, while Sean Penn plays seasoned colleague Gene Rutkovsky. The obvious comparison is Martin Scorsese's *Bringing Out the Dead*, although Sauvaire's film proves less manic and more depressing, following its central duo as they deal with a succession of 911 calls. Employing a semi-doc style and featuring grizzled turns from Sheridan and Penn, it's a tough and often unsparing watch. **JAMES MOTTRAM**

DAMSEL 12

★★★★★ **OUT NOW** NETFLIX

Millie Bobby Brown plays Elodie, a poor villager whose family sells her into royal matrimony for gold. Before she can say 'I don't', Elodie is lobbed into the mountain catacombs as a sacrifice to a savage dragon – but she won't burn easily. Director Juan Carlos Fresnadillo (*28 Weeks Later*) keeps the monster in the shadows a little too long, but the mix of lunging jump scares and Elodie's Ripley-esque survival instincts help beef up an undercooked script. And as Elodie progresses from terrified to resourceful to righteously raging, it's Brown who puts the most fire in *Damsel*'s belly. **KEVIN HARLEY**

She was still annoyed she hadn't managed to find a blue or teal pestle and mortar

THE TEACHERS' LOUNGE 12A

Learning curve...

★★★★★ **OUT 12 APRIL** CINEMAS

Following a spate of thefts from the staffroom, feelings are running high at a German secondary school. Pupils resent the heavy-handed methods used by the teachers to find the culprit, which include anonymous denunciations and the frisking of wallets. Shocked by the tactics of her colleagues, new teacher Carla Nowak (Leonie Benesch) believes she has proof of who is responsible, only for her intervention to escalate tensions even further.

German-Turkish director/co-writer Ilker Çatak employs various methods to heighten the drama's suspense: the camera prowls along the corridors of the school premises, which we never leave; the use of the boxy Academy screen ratio adds to the claustrophobic mood; and there's a disquieting score from composer Marvin Miller. Yet *The Teachers' Lounge* isn't a conventional whodunit, maintaining ambiguity throughout regarding the innocence or guilt of its characters.

What plays out at this particular educational establishment is a microcosm of an increasingly polarised wider society: we witness how social media can feed disinformation; the inability of opposing groups to compromise with one another; and the dangers of herd mentalities. The performances across the board give the material a genuine sense of credibility, with Benesch outstanding as a principled individual who finds her certainties beginning to unravel in such fraught circumstances. **TOM DAWSON**

THE VERDICT Everyone has their reasons in this suspenseful and astutely observed scholastic drama.

R.J. Cyler and LaKeith Stanfield as best friends Elijah and Clarence

THE BOOK OF CLARENCE 15

He's not the Messiah...

★★★☆☆ **OUT 19 APRIL** CINEMAS

The Hollywood biblical epic was always ripe for parody – and so it came to pass in *Monty Python's Life of Brian* (1979). Four decades on, writer/director Jeymes Samuel (*The Harder They Fall*) has another stab at pricking the genre's pomposity, with amusing but muddled results.

It's great fun watching Jerusalem deadbeat Clarence (LaKeith Stanfield) try to dodge a gambling debt by attempting to become Jesus's 13th apostle and, when that fails, setting out his stall as a messianic miracle-worker. Meanwhile, Samuel has a ball crafting a hip new spin on Roman Judea, in which shisha pipes turn their users into floating stoners, a stern John the Baptist (David Oyelowo) combines slaps with immersions, and a chariot race is staged on the same Matera thoroughfare that Daniel Craig used in *No Time to Die*.

But anarchic gusto gives way to po-faced reverence as Clarence gains a conscience and, confusingly, preternatural powers. And in a puzzling tonal blend, a Da Vinci-esque Last Supper is milked for laughs while a mass crucifixion is played bloodily straight.

Stanfield, on double duty as Clarence and his twin brother Thomas, is a charismatic lead in a cast that boasts more than one enjoyable cameo. Yet you can't help concluding that Samuel's laudable ambition to give his mischievous comedy a deeper resonance was too heavy a cross to bear. **NEIL SMITH**

THE VERDICT An inclusive riposte to Gospel truth that ultimately loses the courage of its satirical convictions.

OPPONENT TBC

★★★★☆ **OUT 12 APRIL** CINEMAS

An outstanding lead performance by Payman Maadi (*A Separation*, TV's *Westworld*) lies at the heart of this powerful, slow-burning drama from Swedish-Iranian filmmaker Milad Alami. Claiming to be a victim of political persecution, Iranian wrestler Iman (Maadi) has sought asylum in Sweden with his wife and children, and is now existing in limbo at a refugee centre in the far north of the country. The desolate snowbound landscapes are contrasted with the visceral indoor wrestling sequences, as the volatile Iman is painfully torn between familial duties and forbidden desires. **TOM DAWSON**

I COULD NEVER GO VEGAN TBC

★★★★☆ **OUT 19 APRIL** CINEMAS

Thomas Pickering's excellent doc tackles the most common objections to turning vegan – the cost, the tastiness of meals, baking without dairy – while also highlighting the reported benefits: increased life expectancy, less disease, improved animal welfare and a reduction in the rate of climate change. Harrowing sequences at UK slaughterhouses will also give even the most ardent carnivores pause for thought, though the real success is in how Pickering dissects the evidence to build a case that is thoughtful, provocative and ultimately persuasive. **TIM COLEMAN**

MAX BEYOND TBC

★★☆☆☆ **OUT 22 APRIL** DIGITAL

This so-so animated action thriller employs Unreal Engine, the same tech used in games like *Fortnite*. The big-eyed humans have a ceramic-doll quality, but the apoca-futureworld (collapsed economy, riots, war) is effectively rendered. It's a less compelling story inside a facility, where imprisoned 'asset' Max (Cade Tropeano) has visions of his older brother Leon (Dave Fennoy) dying in a rescue attempt. Using his ability to surf the multiverse, can Max find the one dimension that offers escape? Here's hoping that the upcoming, same-titled video game offers a more involving experience. **JAMIE GRAHAM**

FANTASTIC MACHINE 15

★★★★☆ **OUT 19 APRIL** CINEMAS

With 500 hours of 'content' being created every single minute, filmmakers Axel Danielson and Maximilien Van Aertryck were definitely not short of material when they came to make this treatise on how the photographic image has shaped (and warped) human behaviours over the past 200 years. A call for improved media literacy in a world where perception is all, this nimble documentary (exec-produced by *Triangle of Sadness*' Ruben Östlund) draws a line from the first snaps to today's 24-hour news cycles, revealing en route both how far and how little we've travelled in the interim. **NEIL SMITH**

ALEXANDER TKHOMIROV, ALTITUDE, DARTMOUTH FILMS, HAZAMATION, METFILM, NEW WAVE FILMS, PICTUREHOUSE, SONY

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IO CAPITANO TBC

Journey into fear...

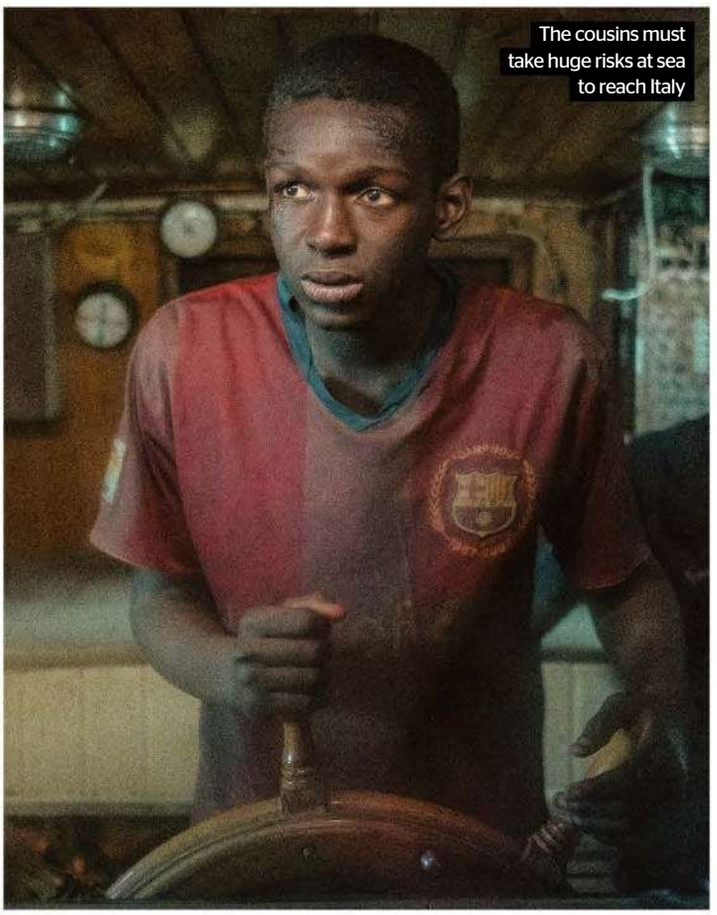
★★★★★ **OUT 5 APRIL** CINEMAS

After dark fables *Tale of Tales* (2015), *Dogman* (2018) and *Pinocchio* (2019), Italian writer/director Matteo Garrone here turns his attention to the tortuous migrant journey of two Senegalese teenagers heading for Europe.

Living in Dakar, 16-year-old cousins Seydou (Seydou Sarr) and Moussa (Moustapha Fall) depart for Italy, first by overcrowded bus, and then on foot as two members of a party forced to cross the blistering Sahara Desert to Libya. En route they are ripped off and far worse by traffickers, with beatings and killings and time spent in a squalid prison all part of their journey. And still the worst lies ahead – aiming an overloaded rust bucket of a boat in the vague direction of Sicily and relying on Allah to steer them across the Mediterranean.

Though undeniably harrowing, Garrone's drama finds beauty in its unforgiving landscapes, and grace in its protagonists' hopes, dreams and responses to terrible setbacks. It is, beneath the surface, another of Garrone's fairy tales, its heroes having to overcome a series of trials as they journey towards adulthood. But never is the brutal reality compromised – it's subtly and assuredly done, even when Garrone introduces the odd flourish of magical realism. Will this Homeric tale be fitted with a happy ending? That you're never sure of what's to come is to Garrone's great credit. **JAMIE GRAHAM**

THE VERDICT Nominated for Best International Feature Film at the Oscars and Best Foreign Language Film at the Golden Globes, *Io Capitano* is a tough trip, but well worth taking.



The cousins must take huge risks at sea to reach Italy

'And when I say action, I'd like you to take your time...'

CLOSE YOUR EYES 12A

Catch a fallen star...

★★★★★ **OUT 12 APRIL** CINEMAS

Despite his status as one of Spain's greatest directors, *Close Your Eyes* is only Víctor Erice's fourth feature, made 50 years after his cinema-haunted classic childhood fable *The Spirit of the Beehive* (1973).

Film and its power to inspire also fuel his rich, rambling detective story, which lures us in with a handsome and unfinished film-within-a-film, 1990's *The Farewell Gaze*, where a war veteran is charged with finding a mysterious tycoon's daughter.

Twenty-plus years later, the film's broke director Miguel (a world-weary Manolo Solo) is enlisted by a 'cold case' TV show to help investigate why lead actor Julio Arenas (José Coronado) disappeared for good during shooting. This thoughtful, meandering film uses Miguel's mournful curiosity to truffle out Julio's disillusioned daughter (Ana Torrent, a poignant callback to her *Beehive* role), and stoical one-time lover and anti-Franco activist Lola (Soledad Villamil), to weigh up if Julio was suicidal or murdered for adultery, or if he just plain vanished.

Taking a *Dune*-worthy 169 minutes to tell its ruminative tale, this is Slow Cinema at its slowest. But if the story is slender, the themes are big, and Julio's mystery untangles in a gentle but engrossing fashion that shows how life's losses can become unlikely gains. A heartfelt elegy for big-screen cinema, it's also an intriguing commentary on Erice's career gaps; let's hope it's the start of a Malick-style comeback. **KATE STABLES**

THE VERDICT Erice's film-obsessed arthouse mystery is glacially paced, but its good things come to those who wait.

Paul looks for his breather, without realising it's (you know where this joke is going, don't you?) right under his nose

DUNE: PART TWO 12A

Fine and sandy...

★★★★★ **OUT NOW** CINEMAS

Blockbuster as grand tragedy? War movie as political/psychological/romantic fable? Sci-fi spectacle as colonial allegory? However you cut it, Denis Villeneuve wrangles coherence from *Dune* author Frank Herbert's unruly elements to deliver a sequel that ranks alongside *The Dark Knight*, *The Empire Strikes Back* and the director's own *Blade Runner 2049*.

The action picks up shortly after 2021's *Part One*. Their people massacred by House Harkonnen, Paul Atreides (Timothée Chalamet) and mum Jessica (Rebecca Ferguson) join the Fremen, who live as one with the planet Arrakis. As Paul bonds with Fremen scrapper Chani (Zendaya), he has nightmares of grim destiny. Will he convert his Fremen doubters and become the messianic Muad'Dib, as prophesied?

Villeneuve delivers with forceful style. Hypnotic and horrifying images mount, the sound mix thumps your torso and Hans Zimmer's score conjures wonder, scale and impact. Among the well-appointed cast, the lead trio shine brightest. Zendaya invests feeling in a character smartly built up from Herbert's vision. Chalamet blossoms in tandem with Paul, showing previously untapped reserves of command. And Austin Butler oozes toxic trouble as Harkonnen heir Feyd-Rautha.

The sharply judged climax leaves room for more. Could *Dune Messiah* be adapted next, as teased? Tall order, but there's little doubt Villeneuve is the man to see a way through that delirious desert storm. **KEVIN HARLEY**

THE VERDICT The spice is mighty in a richly satisfying sequel that fulfils and exceeds its predecessor's promise.

THE SWEET EAST 18

Free Ryder...

★★★☆☆ **OUT 29 MARCH** CINEMAS

Talia Ryder isn't actually related to her namesake Winona. Yet there's a lot of the *Heathers* star in the younger Ryder's quizzical turn in *The Sweet East*, an episodic road movie-slash-coming-of-age drama about a bored teenager from South Carolina who goes wilfully AWOL during a hedonistic school trip to her nation's grandiose capital.

Hooking up first with a band of dumpster-diving artivists, disaffected Lillian (Ryder) goes on to form an attachment with a Poe-obsessed white supremacist called Lawrence (*Red Rocket*'s Simon Rex) who gives her room and board in return for unspecified sexual favours. It's not long, however, before he also is traded up for two indie filmmakers (Jeremy O. Harris and Ayo Edebiri) who cast her in a wigs-and-corsets period piece they're making with British hottie Ian (Jacob Elordi).

Further adventures ensue, each more surreal and outlandish than the last. Yet Lillian views it all with insouciant equanimity, her Gen Z cool resolutely unruffled even when she is confronted with sudden gun-based violence. Cinematographer-turned-director Sean Price Williams lensed 2017's *Good Time* for the Safdie brothers, and he brings a similar, improvisatory scrappiness to his debut feature, shot on grainy 16mm. As fitfully enthralling as the film is, though, it doesn't ultimately amount to much more than a rogues' gallery of garrulous eccentrics, cancelling each other out. **NEIL SMITH**

THE VERDICT A hip young cast shines in a diverting if disposable jaunt up America's eastern seaboard.

Watch out for a boyfriend with scissors for hands in her future...

LIONSGATE, MODERN FILMS, SEARCHLIGHT, TRAFALGAR, UTOPIA, WARNER BROS. © MCMXCIX PATHE FUND LIMITED

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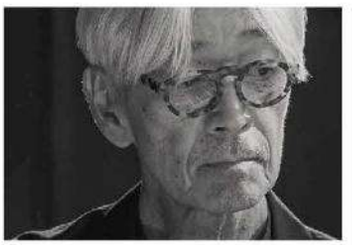
THE GREATEST HITS TBC

★★☆☆☆ **OUT 12 APRIL** DISNEY+

It's a case of time traveller's strife for grieving Harriet (*Chevalier*'s Lucy Boynton), who only has to hear a snatch of certain songs to be whisked back to happy days spent with the boyfriend (new Superman David Corenswet) she lost to a car crash. Can she remix her past, even if it means missing out on love with Justin H. Min's antique seller? Maudlin, glum and flatly acted, writer/director Ned Benson's (2014's *The Disappearance of Eleanor Rigby*) fantasy stumbles when it should (quantum) leap. Odd a film about the persistence of memory should be so consistently unmemorable. **NEIL SMITH**



RYUICHI SAKAMOTO: OPUS TBC

★★★★☆ **OUT 29 MARCH** CINEMAS

Released to mark the first anniversary of Sakamoto's death, this is an intimate recording of the great composer's final performance, directed by his son Neo Sora. Unable to perform for audiences due to his cancer diagnosis, Sakamoto (*Merry Christmas Mr. Lawrence*, *The Revenant*) channelled his all into a singular solo concert, filmed in 2022. The ambitious showcase spans 20 pieces from across his career, shot in sombre black and white, without commentary. With Sakomoto aware that this could be his last performance, it feels hauntingly elegiac. **JOEL HARLEY**

IMAGINARY 15

★★☆☆☆ **OUT NOW** CINEMAS

Blumhouse's latest offering follows Jessica (DeWanda Wise) as she moves her family – Tom Payne's cookie-cutter 'horror husband' and two stepkids – into her childhood home. In the basement, youngest daughter Alice (Pyper Braun, the best actor of the bunch) discovers Jessica's old teddy bear Chauncey; creepiness, naturally, ensues. There are some decent-enough scares, from the impactful cold open to the pull-string set-piece. But for a film about the power of imagination, it's frustrating how little this ultimately toothless effort trusts the audience to use its own. **AMY WEST**

CHRISTSPIRACY 15

★★☆☆☆ **OUT NOW** CINEMAS

It's fair to say that one shouldn't expect too much nuance from an investigative documentary with a title as clunky as *Christspiracy*. Even so, Kip Andersen and Kameron Waters' effort is surprisingly flimsy, giving the sense that you're watching an extended YouTube video rather than a piece of cinema. Despite the broad title, the actual scope is narrow, centring on speculation over whether Jesus was a vegetarian. For those who are highly devout and would immediately put down a burger on hearing that Christ would approve, this may hold some weight. Otherwise, there's little to chew on. **LEILA LATIF**

William Eadie gives a searing performance as young James

RATCATCHER 15

Glasgow bliss...

1999 ★★★★★ **OUT 12 APRIL** CINEMAS

As we wait for news about Lynne Ramsay's first film (*Polaris*? *Die, My Love*?) since 2017's blistering *You Were Never Really Here*, the scab-kneed poetry of the Scottish director's still-startling debut reiterates why we're waiting so expectantly.

After several rarefied shorts, Ramsay arrived fully formed with *Ratcatcher*, a rough-edged tale of innocence and experience set on Glasgow's mean streets circa the 1973 bin strikes. Harbouring a guilty secret involving a friend's death, young James (William Eadie) navigates the churn and turmoil of youth with a haunted expression.

The opening sets the polarities of Ramsay's vision, as a boy is awakened from a floaty reverie by a slap from his mum for messing with the curtains. Worse will follow for him, and Ramsay repeatedly pivots between the tough and the tender, rapture and rough reality. 'I'm always gorgeous when you're half-cut,' says James' ma to his beer-soaked da, nailing the extremes. Later, The Chordettes' perky *Lollipop* plays while da – bleeding from a fight – slaps ma.

Like its near-contemporary, David Gordon Green's *George Washington*, *Ratcatcher* mounts unsentimental yet fitfully lyrical portraits of childhood. A boy drowns, a rat flies to the moon: in between, Ramsay teases out youthful yearnings for somewhere better in images of rhapsodic power. Whatever she makes next, make it come soon.

KEVIN HARLEY

THE VERDICT Bruised and beautiful, surreal and scuffed, Ramsay's debut is an unforgettable one of a kind.

Never mind a song and a dance, get your faces washed!

MARY POPPINS PG

Nanny GOAT...

1964 ★★★★★ **OUT 29 MARCH** CINEMAS

Now 60 years old, the Disney classic gets a 4K cinema rerelease in time for the Easter hols. Based on P.L. Travers' book series and starring Julie Andrews as the magical English nanny who comes to look after the Banks family, Robert Stevenson's film set an Oscar benchmark for the Mouse House: 13 nominations and five wins, including Best Actress for Andrews (in her first major film role, no less). Set in 1910, in a London that feels like it's been conjured from a dream, it's an utterly effervescent experience.

What worked then still works today, not least the brilliantly memorable songs by Richard M. and Robert B. Sherman, including *A Spoonful of Sugar*, *Let's Go Fly a Kite* and the Oscar-winning *Chim Chim Cher-ee*. True, you still have to stomach Dick Van Dyke's wayward Cockney accent as Bert, Poppins' odd-job-man pal, but that now feels like part of the charm. As, of course, does Van Dyke's other role in the film, hidden initially behind an anagramatical credit.

While David Tomlinson as the father to the not-too-brattish Jane and Michael (Karen Dotrice, Matthew Garber) is particularly well cast, nothing can surpass Andrews, whose no-nonsense but warm-hearted nanny never puts a foot (or a precise line reading) wrong. Factor in the animated flourishes – Van Dyke and those dancing penguins together on stage – and *Mary Poppins* still entertains, in the most delightful way. **JAMES MOTTRAM**

THE VERDICT Timeless and joyful family fare. Or to put it another way, supercalifragilisticexpialidocious.

THAT COLD DAY IN THE PARK 15

1969 ★★★☆☆ **OUT 8 APRIL** BD

EXTRAS ★★★☆☆

Commentary, Extended cut/scenes, Featurettes, Gallery, Booklet

A lonely lady (Sandy Dennis) invites a seemingly adrift 19-year-old (Michael Burns) into her apartment, but isn't so keen to let him leave... The trailer pushes *Park* as a psychosexual thriller (probing the 'deepest crevices of human emotion'), but it's more quirky than thirsty, thanks to a pre-*M*A*S*H* Robert Altman minting several of his trademarks, from unvarnished dialogue to inquisitive zooms. Minor Altman for sure, but pleasingly loose for a 'genre' flick. **MATTHEW LEYLAND**

ROOM AT THE TOP 12

1958 ★★★★★ **OUT NOW**

DVD, BD, DIGITAL

EXTRAS ★★★☆☆

Commentaries, Featurettes, Gallery

'A raw savage story of our times,' promised the publicity for this adaptation of John Braine's bestseller. Director Jack Clayton's ferocious and frank tale of ambition and adultery ushered in a new era of social realism in British cinema. Replacing the earlier BFI Blu-ray, Studiocanal's disc doesn't offer any upgrades to the film itself, but adds a couple of new extras, with actor Delena Kidd vividly describing leading lady Simone Signoret as 'astonishing... I remember she had the most incredible smell.' **ANTON VAN BEEK**

HAPPY END 15

1967 ★★★★☆ **OUT NOW** BD

EXTRAS ★★★★☆

Commentary, Video essay, Booklet

The beginning is the end and the end is the beginning in this pitch-black experimental comedy from Czech director Oldřich Lipský and co-writer Milos Macourek. Shot in sepia tones and employing reverse chronology, it tells the surreal story of convicted murderer Bedřich (a wonderful Vladimír Mensík) from death to birth, with characters moving backwards in time through the frame. Filled with sight gags and incongruous dialogue, the digitally restored *Happy End* playfully celebrates cinema's illusionistic nature. Informative extras. **TOM DAWSON**

FEAR CITY 18

1984 ★★★☆☆ **OUT NOW** BD

EXTRAS ★★★☆☆

Commentary, Uncut version, Booklet

Following brutal rape-revenge thriller *Ms. 45* (1981), controversial filmmaker Abel Ferrara enjoyed an unlikely flirtation with the mainstream, the fruits of which include this entertainingly sleazy thriller about a martial-arts maniac murdering Manhattan's strippers. If anything, given the gonzo plot, *Fear City* could have done with being even weirder, but Ferrara adds lashings of scuzzy NYC grime. The alternate cut restores some lesbian drama the censors apparently found more concerning than women having their fingers cut off. **ANTON VAN BEEK**

101 FILMS, ARROW, COLUMBIA, DISNEY, PARAMOUNT, SECOND RUN, SECOND SIGHT, SPIRIT ENTERTAINMENT, STUDIOCANAL

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FOOTLOOSE 15

1984 ★★★★★ **OUT NOW** 4K UHD

EXTRAS ★★★★★

Commentaries, Featurettes

The quintessentially 80s flick that launched Kevin Bacon to stardom and taught teens how to overcome totalitarianism through the power of dance may not be the greatest movie ever made (sorry, Star-Lord), but it is an absolute blast. And having danced its way onto 4K UHD in time for its 40th anniversary, *Footloose* finally looks like an actual film again, rather than the over-processed, digitised mess released on Blu-ray back in 2011. A lively 5.1 mix, meanwhile, ensures that the soundtrack (the title track, *Let's Hear It for the Boy*, et al) truly sings. **ANTON VAN BEEK**

ALL THAT MONEY CAN BUY PG

1941 ★★★★★ **OUT 8 APRIL** BD

EXTRAS ★★★★★

Commentary, Featurettes, Radio adaps, Essays

Based on Stephen Vincent Benét's story *The Devil and Daniel Webster*, William Dieterle's folksy Faustian fable has been known by many names – a bit like the evil one himself, here called Mr. Scratch and played with Oscar-nommed impishness by Walter Huston. Imposing work, too, from Edward Arnold as the lawyer trying to break farmer James Craig's deal with the devil. Meanwhile, there are enough eerie touches – Satanic lullabies, smoky visuals, startling cutaways – to offset the general preachiness. **MATTHEW LEYLAND**

THE LAVENDER HILL MOB U

1951 ★★★★★ **OUT 29 MARCH**

CINEMAS **22 APRIL** 4K UHD, DIGITAL

EXTRAS ★★★★★

Commentary, Intro, Featurettes, Gallery, Booklet, Posters, Art cards

One of the biggest jewels in the Ealing crown, this tale of larceny remains hugely enjoyable. Alec Guinness and Stanley Holloway are, respectively, the bank clerk and artist who plot to steal gold bullion with help from crims Sid James and Alfie Bass, but whose efforts go enthrallingly awry. With director Charles Crichton expertly marshalling his sublime cast, this is 24-carat comedy. Extras contribs include Martin Scorsese and Paul Merton. **JAMES MOTTRAM**

GREEN ROOM 18

2015 ★★★★★ **OUT NOW**

BD, 4K UHD, DUAL FORMAT

EXTRAS ★★★★★

Commentaries, Featurettes, Visual essay, Art cards, Book

The late Anton Yelchin co-stars with fellow Star Trek alumnus Patrick Stewart (playing against type) in this claustrophobic siege thriller, in which a punk band is pitted against a gang of neo-Nazis in a remote club. On top of the expected visual upgrade, *Green Room*'s 4K do-over adds plenty of new extras, including a fascinating chat with writer/director Jeremy Saulnier that takes a poignant turn when the subject shifts to the joy of 'capturing Anton in his prime'. **ANTON VAN BEEK**

Marlon Brando (right) won a Best Actor Academy Award for his complex performance as boxer Terry

ON THE WATERFRONT PG

Still a contender...

1954 ★★★★★ **OUT 5 APRIL** CINEMAS

Elia Kazan is a problematic figure, remembered as both an incredible director but also for naming names during the Hollywood blacklist era. Lovingly restored to 4K for its 70th birthday, *On the Waterfront* is not just one of his greatest films, rivalled only by *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *East of Eden* (which featured – respectively – Marlon Brando and James Dean's breakthrough roles), it's arguably one of the greatest films ever made, filled with the complex moralities and antiheroes that were Kazan's stock in trade.

Reunited with Kazan, Brando plays Terry Malloy, a boxer who dreams of being 'a contender' but is surrounded by corrupt labour unions and mob bosses who scupper his hopes. It's down to Terry to figure out whether he wants to accept the rotten system around him or fight it. Brando is utterly phenomenal in the role, resembling a living Rodin sculpture in his muscular expressiveness. Kazan captures the waterfront of the New Jersey shore with crisp precision, suggesting that violence and corruption lie around every corner.

It's a film that could be read as Kazan's attempt at self-justification, implying that he viewed himself – like Terry – as someone who was calling out potential communists because it was down to the individual to stand up for what they believed, no matter how unpopular. That's not a justification that has aged particularly well, but the film remains a masterpiece. **LEILA LATIF**

THE VERDICT Elia Kazan's tragic tale of an ex-prizefighter in New Jersey has lost none of its punching power.

Xena and sidekick Gabrielle: 'pushing the boundaries for representation on TV'

A VERY SPECIAL EPISODE

THE QUEST
S2, 1997
With Xena sidelined in her own show after Lucy Lawless fractured her pelvis, *The Quest* sees her spirit possessing the body of master thief Autolycus (Bruce Campbell). Cue plenty of laughs, some poignant life-or-death drama, and Xena and Gabrielle's first real kiss (even if they aren't really Xena's lips).

CLASSIC TV
XENA: WARRIOR PRINCESS
Girls just wanna have fun...

1995-2001 AVAILABLE ON DVD, DIGITAL

In a time of ancient gods, warlords and kings, a land in turmoil cried out for a hero. She was Xena, a mighty princess forged in the heat of battle… Her courage will change the world,' ran the narration that opened each episode of *Xena: Warrior Princess*. While it may be stretching things to say that the 1990s fantasy series changed the world, it certainly played a role in pushing the boundaries for representation on television.

Not that things started out that way. After Xena made her debut in the Sam Raimi-produced *Hercules: the Legendary Journeys* (1995-1999), it's not difficult to see why Universal Television wanted to give Lucy Lawless' leather-clad warrior her own show. From the character's revealing costume to adventures featuring enough bondage imagery to make Wonder Woman creator William Moulton Marston blush, *Xena…* seemed tailor-made to appeal to horny teenage boys.

But as the adventures of Xena and her sidekick Gabrielle (Reneé O'Connor) continued, it became clear that something was bubbling away under the surface. Both characters enjoyed relationships with men, but the hints were there that the two mythological women's feelings ran far deeper than simple friendship. In a pre-social-media era, Lawless says that she and O'Connor first became aware of what was happening when they were handed a *Village Voice* article about Xena and Gabrielle's sexualities. 'Reneé and I looked at each other and went, "Lesbians? Really? OK." It was cool with us.'

Having a show led by two gay characters may have been cool for the show's leads and the writers' room – who, says Lawless, 'totally knew what they were doing.' But it wasn't for the syndicated TV landscape in the mid 1990s. According to producer Rob Tapert, 'the studio was so concerned that it would be perceived as a lesbian show that they would not allow us to have Xena and Gabrielle in the same frame of the opening titles.'

So it's hardly surprising that Xena and Gabrielle's romantic relationship was never formally confirmed on-screen, remaining largely subtextual. But the writers continued to find ways to work around broadcast restrictions, even going as far as to have the characters' reincarnated souls marry in an episode set in the present day. It may not seem like much today, but at a time when the LGBTQ+ community rarely ever felt seen and heard on mainstream TV, *Xena: Warrior Princess* was fighting for a more inclusive future. **ANTON VAN BEEK**

ALAMY

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EXTRAS

COMESTIBLE

HEINZ: THE GODFATHER PASTA SAUCE

OUT NOW

'Come over here, kid, learn something. You start with a little bit of oil. Then you fry some garlic. Then you throw in a jar of Heinz's The Godfather Pasta Sauce…' Yes, you can now recreate the legendary Michael-gets-a-cooking-lesson scene from Coppola's classic, thanks to this new limited-edition sauce, made from sun-ripened Italian Heinz tomatoes. For an encore, how about a *Godfather Part II* celebration cake? Or a *Part III* cannoli (hold the poison)? Pore over heinztohome.co.uk.

COLLECTIBLES

GHOSTBUSTERS TUBBZ

OUT APRIL (TBC)

To paraphrase Peter Venkman: so, she's a duck. A cosplaying duck, to be exact; yes, Dana Barrett has joined the TUBBZ range, alongside three other key players from the 1984 film: Terror Dog/Duck, Gozer and Louis Tully (complete with colander helmet). The new intake brings the full *Ghostbusters* line-up to 15, each one made from high-quality PVC and standing roughly 9cm tall (aside from XL Stay Puft) outside of their tub display stand. Waddle over to numskull.com.

COLLECTIBLES/TOYS

LEGO STAR WARS 25TH ANNIVERSARY

OUT NOW

This year marks the 25th anniversary not only of a certain prequel, but of the union between Lego and Lucasfilm. And to celebrate, the construction-toy king is bringing out several new Star Wars sets, including new builds based on the *Millennium Falcon* and General Grievous' *Invisible Hand* ship; two takes on the *Tantive IV* (exterior/interior); and a 1,050-piece, 24cm-high R2-D2. Upping their collectibility, the sets boast 25th-anniversary branding and a few mini-figure exclusives. If there's a bright centre to the universe, it's surely lego.com.

MATTHEW LEYLAND

COLLECTIBLE

LEGO SNOW WHITE AND THE SEVEN DWARFS COTTAGE

OUT NOW

Built for adults, this tribute to the OG Disney princess includes 10 mini-figures (Snow White, the Dwarfs, the Prince and the Queen), six animal figures, a cottage with removable roof, wishing well and, last but not least, Ms. White's (temporary) glass coffin. You might need a lie-down yourself after building this 2,228-piece set (which measures 20x35x20cm) – but you'll also be glowing like the light-brick-powered hearth. Heigh-ho, heigh-ho, now off to lego.com you go.

HEINZ, LEGO, NUMSKULL

FRESH SPINS

From worm rides to wide-open highways...

DUNE: PART TWO
★★★★★
Even by his own outsized standards, Hans Zimmer's return to Arrakis is an extravagantly inventive and emphatic career peak. Splicing the duduk with Loire Cotler's ecstatic voice, the love theme is as beautiful as *Harkonnen Arena* (Queen's *Ming's Theme* made steroidal?) is body-slam brutal. And after extraordinary feats of Vangelis-grade world-building, unleash-hell action cues and spice-tripping mystique, the pay-offs are immense: triumphant yet ominous, *Kiss the Ring* leaves you longing for *Dune: Messiah*.

DRIVE-AWAY DOLLS
★★★☆☆
Coen brother Ethan's LGBTQ+ road movie bundles up a scattershot but spry mix of on-message pop and classy scoring. Carter Burwell does the latter honours, mixing lively blends of guitar twang, noir-ish mood-crafting and dreamy send-offs (*Hers and Hers*). Song-wise, The Liverbirds and Le Tigre set a brisk pace, psych-rockers Kennelmus and queercore punks Longstocking add colour, and Linda Ronstadt's *Long Long Time* remains – after *The Last of Us* – a welcome travelling pal.

Kong's on song! Max Steiner's score is revolutionary

CLASSIC SOUNDTRACK
KING KONG

MAX STEINER AMANITA

The way composer Max Steiner told it, filmmakers saw music as a 'necessary evil' in the late 1920s. Happily, it was a necessity that producer/director Merian C. Cooper embraced. When RKO Pictures suggested Cooper save money and use library music for *King Kong* (1933), he offered to pay for Steiner himself.

For $50,000, Cooper landed a score that maxed *Kong*'s cultural clout and changed scoring history. If Steiner was the 'father of film music' (as he is often described), then *Kong* was the daddy of scores, drawn from the influences of classical music and opera via a 46-piece orchestra, whose players multitasked furiously. Steiner's outsized achievement wasn't the first film score, or even *his* first, but his efforts crystallised what a symphonic score for a major movie could be.

Besides writing music around dialogue, Steiner seeded character themes that thread through the film, securing audiences' investment and amplifying viewers' responses. Kong gets a three-note theme, which opens the film ominously and then shifts according to the ape's frankly wayward mood swings: majestic or aggressive, romantic or broken.

Ann's theme is dreamy, though at times it clashes with Kong's to amplify the tension. Elsewhere, frenetic tribal tunes and a jaunty adventure theme for the sailors can be heard – though not for the film's opening stretch. Ingeniously, Steiner didn't score the prologue: the music only arrives as Skull Island looms into fog-shrouded view, with rolling harps and suspenseful strings reeling us in as if by hypnosis.

From here, Steiner executes enthralling exercises in lavish world-building and action, weaving his main themes around primal cues for stand-offs with sundry prehistoric creatures. *The Snake – The Bird – The Swimmers* is exemplary, ranging from playfulness to dread, horror and rage over seven tumultuous minutes.

Back in NY, Steiner sets Kong's capture, escape and rampage to fanfares and crescendos of thrilling intensity. By the time of *Aeroplanes*, Kong and Ann's themes have tightly merged; as he scales the Empire State Building, his cue ascends thrillingly in sync with his progress. In helping audiences feel Kong's transition from a creature of terror to pity, Steiner's music works miracles.

That aptitude for emotional grandeur would lead to further glory in scores for *Gone with the Wind*, *Now, Voyager* and beyond. Steiner's use of leitmotifs was much-adopted, too, just as Kong himself would be revisited. John Barry and James Newton Howard scored the 1976 and 2005 remakes respectively – and respectably. But in terms of impact and majesty, there can be only one king. **KEVIN HARLEY**

BACK LOT MUSIC, WARNER BROS., WATERTOWER MUSIC

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Taking on giant alien bugs while spreading 'managed democracy' in *Helldivers 2*

GAMES
HELLDIVERS 2

Boom raiders...

★★★★★ **OUT NOW** PC, PS5

Paul Verhoeven's *Starship Troopers* has been a pervasive influence on video games for a quarter of a century, though none of the film's various adaptations has yet managed to recapture its heady blend of militaristic satire and spectacular alien-blasting action. This explosive sequel to Arrowhead Game Studios' likeable but little-discussed 2015 squad-based shooter gets about as close as any game has. You're part of the eponymous group, sent by the Federation of Super Earth to spread 'managed democracy' throughout the galaxy – with, as an introductory video puts it, 'the gentle touch of an iron fist'.

Perhaps mindful of the early reactions to Verhoeven's film, it's clear from the outset that *Helldivers 2* is taking no chances with its satire. The action is similarly heavy-handed by design: the camera may have shifted from the original's bird's-eye view to a more conventional third-person perspective but it otherwise retains the same rhythm, heft and purposeful frictions. You can't jump, for example, but you can dive, and there's no automatic reload.

Friendly fire, meanwhile, is as deadly a threat as any of your opponents, forcing your group to coordinate their movements carefully – far from easy in the thick of *Helldivers 2*'s breathless action. Taking careful aim at an enemy's weak point, you're no more likely to land a clean shot than to watch in horror as your bullet unerringly finds the head of a teammate running backwards to escape the clutches of an outsized alien bug.

The Federation might have hoped to send Earth's best and brightest, but what follows often suggests your team of expendables are the planet's worst and dimmest. Devastating 'stratagems' – which involve pulling off deliberately complex input commands in the heat of the moment – often go horribly wrong. You might be flattened by the robot you've just blown up as it topples forward onto you, or even crushed by a squadmate's drop pod. That baked-in clumsiness naturally produces a slew of hilarious anecdotes. Yet the catastrophes make the victories feel all the more triumphant – when you somehow stumble back to the extraction point, bloodied but still alive, even a low mission rating can do nothing to diminish the high.

Little wonder so many players have already signed up for the cause. Assuming Arrowhead can iron out the connection problems of *Helldivers 2*'s early weeks (an inevitable by-product of its surprise success), this sensational shooter could be the year's most unlikely awards contender.

CHRIS SCHILLING

DAEDALIC, DIGITAL ECLIPSE, SONY

2 MORE

Recent thumb-twiddlers...

LLAMASOFT: THE JEFF MINTER STORY
★★★★★
OUT NOW PC, PS4/5, SWITCH, XBOX ONE/ SERIES X/S

After its restoration of Jordan Mechner's influential *Karateka*, the second entry in Digital Eclipse's Gold Master Series is effectively a playable origin story for one of the industry's most distinctive figures. From homebrew versions of arcade classics to psychedelic visualisers, this captivating 'interactive documentary' is comparable to Criterion's peerless work in film.

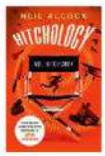
INKULINATI
★★★★★

OUT NOW PC, PS4/5, SWITCH, XBOX ONE/ SERIES X/S

An unlikely companion piece to historical adventure *Pentiment*, this 2D turn-based strategy game is similarly inspired by medieval marginalia. As a scribe, you'll ink armies of flatulent monkeys and bottom-baring rabbits into existence, poking at your creations to heal and reposition them. There's genuine tactical depth beneath the surface silliness.

2 MORE

Auteur-ed states...



HITCHOLOGY

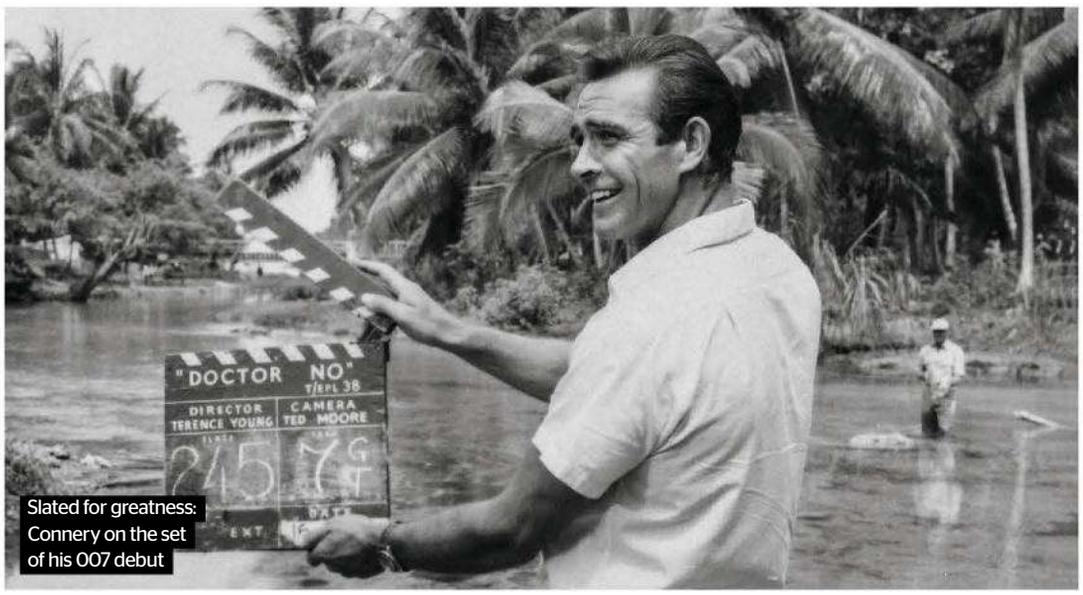
★★★★☆

So much has already been written about Alfred Hitchcock's oeuvre – so why do we need, as author Neil Alcock asks himself, another book on the subject? Focused on making the Master of Suspense's work accessible to the masses, Alcock explores recurring themes, signature cameos and everything in between. Starting with the Essential 10 – those considered Hitch's most important – the book proceeds to cheerily dissect all 52 films. Conversational in tone yet brimming with knowledge, it's a quality read for both fans and neophytes. **JOEL HARLEY**

QUENTIN TARANTINO: A GRAPHIC BIOGRAPHY

★★☆☆☆

Hot on the heels of a similar tome by Amazing Améziane (see last issue), Michele Botton's book offers a biography in the form of a graphic novel. Unfortunately, it lacks the vitality of QT's voice: in a non-linear series of imagined conversations between Tarantino and key players (Grier, Pitt, Travolta, etc), it never feels like we're hearing from the man himself. Meanwhile, the colour palette is oddly muted for an auteur responsible for such iconic, eye-popping imagery. **TIM COLEMAN**



Slated for greatness: Connery on the set of his 007 debut

BOOKS

JAMES BOND: DR. NO

★★★★★ **PAUL DUNCAN** TASCHEN

Only a lucky few get to hang out on the set of a James Bond film. But if you've ever been curious about the meticulous minutiae that go into the making of one, this companion volume will answer all your questions and more. In the most recent edition of *The James Bond Archives* (an earlier Taschen title that *Screen* reviewed in 2021), a mere 30 pages were devoted to *Dr. No*. Here, by contrast, you get close to 500, with more than half given over to a day-by-day account of the first Bond's shooting in Jamaica and Pinewood.

If you're the kind of completist who loves scrutinising internal memos, daily continuity reports and typewritten correspondences, you'll be as thrilled as audiences were in 1962 when Ursula Andress walked out of the ocean in (to quote Berkely Mather's original draft script) 'a wisp of homemade bikini'. Yet there's plenty, too, for the less obsessive fan. Author Paul Duncan's detailed text is illustrated throughout by a gallery's worth of images from the likes of Bunny Yeager, Bert Cann and Bradley Smith.

The latter's on-set photos include a joke snap of a sleeping Sean Connery surrounded by empty beer bottles. Indeed, if there is one takeaway here, it's that the actor was clearly having a ball on his first star vehicle: something that, according to reports, would sadly be supplanted by disillusionment on the 007s that came after. **NEIL SMITH**

THE BLUES BROTHERS

★★★★☆

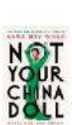
DANIEL DE VISÉ WHITE RABBIT

'A big, noisy, noir valentine to the city of Chicago' is how de Visé describes John Landis' madcap mix of *SNL* (Dan Aykroyd, John Belushi), R&B (Aretha Franklin, James Brown, Ray Charles) and demolition-derby-style vehicular mayhem. This thoroughly researched and engagingly written account situates the film in its cinematic and sociocultural context, exploring how it captured the American zeitgeist in 1980, despite the negative reviews it drew on original release. **TOM DAWSON**

NOT YOUR CHINA DOLL

★★★★☆

KATIE GEE SALISBURY FABER & FABER



Notching up a four-decade career, actor Anna May Wong (*The Thief of Bagdad*) rose to fame as the industry's first Chinese-American movie star; she was also a vocal critic of the racism and typecasting she found in 1920s Hollywood. Author Salisbury tells the trailblazer's tale in this definitive biography, packed with sizzling stories from film sets and decadent parties. Set against a backdrop of jazz-era Los Angeles, the result is a frank and sprightly account of the star's life and legacy. **JOEL HARLEY**

WHAT HAVE WE HERE?

★★★★☆

BILLY DEE WILLIAMS
HODDER & STOUGHTON

Thanks to roles in *Brian's Song*, *Lady Sings the Blues* and *Mahogany*, Billy Dee Williams was being hailed as 'the Black Clark Gable' long before his Lando Calrissian debut in *The Empire Strikes Back*. Yet Hollywood never quite knew how to exploit his debonair charm fully, leaving it to George Lucas (and later J.J. Abrams) to ink his name in celluloid posterity. This memoir finds the octogenarian star on genial, reflective form as he tackles everything from typecasting to (of course) capes. **NEIL SMITH**

DANEBANK, FABER & FABER, FRANCIS LINCOLN, HODDER & STOUGHTON, WHITE RABBIT, DR NO © 1962 METRO-GOLDWYN-MAYER STUDIOS INC. AND DANJAQ, LLC.

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TOTAL FILM BUFF

CINEMA CELEBRATED AND DEBATED. BOOSTING YOUR MOVIE GENIUS TO SUPERHERO LEVELS...

IS IT BOLLOCKS?

Film Buff investigates the facts behind outlandish movie plots.

THIS MONTH
DUNE: PART TWO

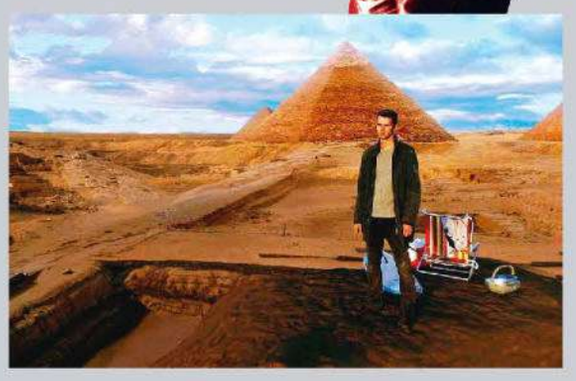
Q Could the water-recycling stillsuits be a viable means to help you survive in Arrakis-like desert conditions?

Denis Villeneuve's sci-fi saga has such a grounded tactility to it that it's easy to believe that everything on screen is real. But could a stillsuit – which recycles sweat, urine and more into drinkable water (and salt) so efficiently that the wearer would not lose more than a thimbleful of liquid – be a realistic option in 2024, almost six decades after Frank Herbert initially envisaged the suits in his 1965 novel? The short answer seems to be that, while the idea is sound – NASA operates a 'closed-loop' system on the International Space Station that captures and filters this water, ending up with a product that is reportedly cleaner than most of that we drink on Earth – the sheer size of the equipment needed to safely filter the water and reclaim the salt would be entirely unfeasible in portable form. Given technology's tendency to shrink over time, it may be possible one day, although we're nowhere near that kind of tech yet.

VERDICT MOSTLY BOLLOCKS

ALTERNATIVE BOX OFFICE

The biggest movies... WITH STUNT-Y TITLES



01	**JUMPER** 2008	$225.1M
02	**DAREDEVIL** 2003	$179.2M
03	**DOUBLE JEOPARDY** 1999	$177.8M
04	**MAN ON FIRE** 2004	$130.8M
05	**HERE COMES THE BOOM** 2012	$73.1M
06	**FALLING DOWN** 1993	$40.9M (US)
07	**MAN ON WIRE** 2008	$5.3M
08	**SHATTERED GLASS** 2003	$2.9M
09	**SOMERSAULT** 2004	$1.5M
10	**GIMME DANGER** 2016	$0.95M

ON LOCATION REEL SPOTS BEHIND THE CAMERA

WHAT? In the Harry Potter franchise, students at Hogwarts roam the school's impressive hallways and staircases.
WHERE? Hall Staircase, Bodley Tower, Christ Church college, University of Oxford
GO? While still a working institution and place of worship, the college welcomes thousands of guests each year, with the staircase, Great Hall and cloisters to visit. Lesser fantasy adap *The Golden Compass* was also shot here. Members of the public can stay overnight in student accommodation during some holidays.

WARNER BROS. ALAMY

Want us to investigate if a movie scenario is bollocks or snapped yourself at a film location? Contact us at totalfilm@futurenet.com

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ADVERTS IN MOVIES

Commercial appeal

1

GOODFELLAS

'Morrie's Wigs' is the epitome of 70s no-budget local TV commercials. The toupee magnate leaps into a swimming pool proudly promising 'Morrie's wigs don't come off!' only for Jimmy Conway (Robert De Niro) to prove him wrong when menacing him with a phone cord.

2

PADDINGTON 2

A trained actor reduced to dog status, skint former West End star Phoenix Buchanan (Hugh Grant) is forced to don a costume to flog pet food – Harley's Gourmet Dindins – swallowing a forkful before 'Not to be consumed by humans' appears with delicious timing.

3

ROBOCOP 2

Worried about your car being stolen in dystopian Detroit? Just install this state-of-the-art Magnavolt security system that traps and lethally electrocutes any would-be car thieves, leaving them a smoking cinder. And the best part? 'It won't even run down your battery.'

4

KINGPIN

Roy Munson's (Woody Harrelson) misery deepens as he sees 'Big Ern' McCracken (Bill Murray) presenting himself as all heart for Unified Fund, sponsoring fatherless families across the country with absolutely no ulterior motives towards their grateful single mothers.

5

DODGEBALL

'Tired of the same old you?' Globo Gym will bully you into shape, courtesy of creepy owner White Goodman (Ben Stiller). Complete with 'competitively priced on-site cosmetic surgery', it represents everything toxic (and hilarious) about the fitness industry.

6

ONCE UPON A TIME... IN HOLLYWOOD

QT's go-to fictional brand, Red Apple cigarettes, takes centre stage with a mid-end credits commercial. Rick Dalton (Leonardo DiCaprio) isn't a fan, declaring, 'This cigarette tastes like fucking shit!' once cut is called.

7

TROPIC THUNDER

Tropic Thunder nailed Hollywood tropes, clichéd trailers and this gloriously OTT plug for energy drink Booty Sweat. Rap star Alpa Chino (Brandon T. Jackson) invites viewers to 'Pop an ass open!' as he grinds with bootylicious dancers and also hypes 'Bust a Nut' bars.

8

GHOSTBUSTERS

A suitably amateur promo for a debt-ridden new business. During the film's release, director Ivan Reitman ran the same ad on late-night TV with a free phone number that played a message from Bill Murray and Dan Aykroyd telling people to go see the movie.

9

THE TRUMAN SHOW

It takes a dedicated thespian to convincingly sell a product, doubly so to weave Mococoa into a marital spat for the benefit of hidden cameras. Laura Linney's role-within-a-role doesn't convince 'husband' Truman (Jim Carrey) as his suspicions about the world around him grow.

10

COMING TO AMERICA

Selling Jheri curls and confidence while depositing oily residue on the furniture, Soul Glo oozes sex appeal and Western vanity. The music was by legendary producer Nile Rodgers, who, in 2016, tweeted that it might be 'my single proudest moment'. **PAUL TANTER**

Did we miss something? Let us know on @totalfilm

REEL ESTATE

FOR SALE This is not a houseboat, but a beautifully appointed floating home situated on the banks of Lake Union in Seattle, Washington. It boasts four bedrooms and two bathrooms, with an outside deck from which to enjoy the waterfront, or you can stroll along to the dock for a delightful bench sit. It's the perfect spot for viewing the fireworks, and there are great restaurants and bars nearby. The single-storey property would be perfect for a father and son to share, and the local radio station is excellent. Don't sleep on it.

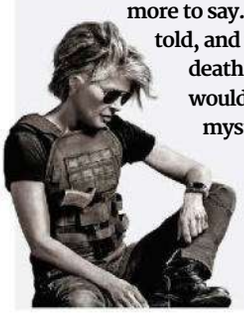
HINDSIGHT CORNER

LINDA HAMILTON
THE TERMINATOR FRANCHISE

SEPTEMBER 2019

'I always felt like the story was complete after *T2*. But I also felt that with all that life has brought me in the last 27 years that I might have more to say. It was about coming to terms with the fact that I'm not what I was, and realising that I'm so much more now.'

FEBRUARY 2024



'I'm done. I'm done. I have nothing more to say. The story's been told, and it's been done to death. Why anybody would relaunch it is a mystery to me. But I know our Hollywood world is built on relaunches right now.'

FLOP CULTURE

WATERWORLD

Dubbed 'Kevin's Gate' and 'Fishtar', Kevin Costner's folly started life as a cheapie. Should it have remained that way?

Why it was a good idea (on paper)

Unlikely as it now may seem, *Waterworld* was first written as a low-budget affair, copying *Mad Max*. With Kevins Reynolds (director) and Costner (star) involved, ocean-sized post-apocalyptic waterworks took over. Could the Kevins repeat the box-office tsunami of *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves*?

What went wrong?

In the event, Reynolds/Costner repeated their squabbles from *Hood*, as Costner assumed control in post-production and Reynolds swam for freedom. Yet even beforehand, the project was profligate and problematic. A reported $65m budget rocketed with the costs of two trimarans, a huge steel atoll and Costner's fee. Then the shoot started… and it turned out that Hawaii's Kawaihae Harbor translated as 'warring waters' for a reason. Choppy weather, seasickness, stingy jellyfish and a sinking 'slave colony' set caused trouble. Costner didn't relish being strapped up a swaying mast for two hours for a shot, but his stunt double had it worse when he suffered an embolism. Amid escalating crises, shooting began without a locked-in screenplay to cling to – and *Speed* script doc Joss Whedon's ideas were not taken on board. As a 96-day shoot extended to 166 days and the budget headed for $175m, hurricanes and off-screen storms (Costner's marital problems) hammered the film's already bruised press. Alongside poor test screenings, gossip that Costner wanted his hairline digi-fixed added to the impression of an ego project bellyflopping.

Redeeming feature

High-seas spectacle, watery world-building, Dennis Hopper's mad-eyed villain: *Waterworld* bloats messily but swings big.

What happened next?

Theatrical returns? Parched. Costner's pull waned. *Wyatt Earp* had underperformed and next came another epic 90s miss, *The Postman*. Home ents proved fertile turf, though; an extended fan cut emerged on BD.

Should it be remade?

With rumours of a sequel series seemingly stilled, *Waterworld* hardly needs relaunching. Just because Costner's Mariner glugs his filtered pee, doesn't mean audiences must consume recycled Hollywood waste.

KEVIN HARLEY

BUDGET	BOX OFFICE	AWARDS	TF STAR RATING	ROTTEN TOMATOES
$175m	$264.2m	0	★★★½	46%

ALAMY

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Silence is golden: *Safety Last!* (left) and *City Lights*

IS IT JUST ME OR WAS THE SILENT ERA THE BEST FOR COMEDY?

TIM COLEMAN
@FATSCOLEMAN

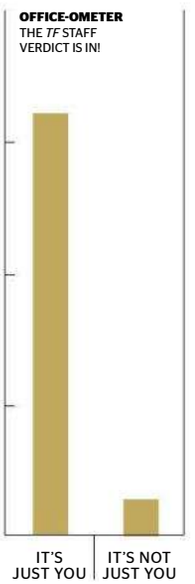
Think of silent cinema and chances are a number of images will come to mind. Count Orlok's shadow on the stairs in *Nosferatu* (1922), perhaps, or the cityscapes of Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927). But sooner or later you'll likely imagine a scene from one of the era's many comedies.

Given that silent films rely on visual storytelling and the odd intertitle, it makes sense that comedy was so central to cinema's creation. Clowns and mimes knew the power of a good sight gag, so it was only natural that such traditional forms of performance translated to the screen, with iconic results.

Take *Safety Last!* (1923), for example. Though more than 100 years old, it has lost none of its power to elicit guffaws and gasps in equal measure. Perhaps most famous for the finale – which sees Harold Lloyd scale a department store building and dangle from a giant clockface – the film has become a kind of shorthand for the madcap stunts and physical comedy that defined the genre.

Speaking of physicality, who can forget Buster Keaton? In an age of weightless CGI, the sight of him balancing on the front of a careering steam engine in *The General* (1926) still wows, as does the spectacular train wreck scene in the film's climax.

And then there was Charlie Chaplin. When *Sight and Sound* released its 100 Greatest Films of All Time critics' poll in 2022, the actor/director had, like Keaton, not one but two entries included. *City Lights* (1931) was made at a time when talkies were the norm, but Chaplin kept the film (mostly) silent, and it's arguably better for it. And although *Modern Times* (1936) included some sound, it still used intertitles – by then retro – for the dialogue.



Sure, laughs can be found in clever wordplay or more modern affectations such as gross-out gags, awkward cringe-com and taboo-breaking shock. But with its endless invention, silent comedy will always reign supreme. Or is it just me?

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ALAMY; GETTY

LAST TIME HAVE WE REACHED PEAK DRONE?

JAMES ANTHONY STALLEY-MOORES
Drones are far cheaper and better for the environment than helicopters.

THOMAS J. PARSON
Drones? Who cares? I'd say Hollywood's biggest problem is its obsession with remakes.

MAX BETA
Drones are just another tool that can be used well or used badly.

RICHARD CADMAN
Don't overuse, maybe. But a complete stop? Don't be ridiculous.

BRIANSMITHNYC
Go back to camera jibs? Jibs are heavy.

CALIGULA

TOTAL FILM RETROSPECTIVE

A scandal upon release, 1979's *Caligula* was destroyed when porn scenes were sliced into the cut, unbeknownst to its director or star Malcolm McDowell. But now rediscovered footage and painstaking work has rescued this raucous Roman epic. *Buff* dons its toga to find out more. **WORDS JAMES MOTTRAM**

Made in the late 1970s, the film *Caligula* became a byword for notoriety. Detailing the life of the titular Roman emperor, it began with a script by esteemed author Gore Vidal before Italian director Tinto Brass (1976's *Salon Kitty*) was brought in to direct it. Then came the fallout as Bob Guccione, publisher of erotic magazine *Penthouse* and the man bankrolling the project, stormed in and filmed soft-core material that made the final cut at the expense of much original material. Suddenly, a film that featured Helen Mirren, John Gielgud and Peter O'Toole was a laughing stock. Or as *Time* magazine put it, the film enjoyed 'all the success of an open-air orgy in Antarctica'.

'I've never liked it,' reflects Malcolm McDowell, the British actor cast as Caligula. 'And I advise people never to see it. It is a terrible film, and it's exploitative and pornographic. For no reason. Except that it's to exploit. And that's what he [Guccione] did. And he really could not care less about what we did as moviemakers, Tinto Brass and myself particularly, because I was there every moment of every day. So when I originally saw it, the Guccione version, I was completely shell-shocked. I've never known a betrayal like that. Just huge scenes taken

ALAMY; GETTY; COURTESY OF PENTHOUSE FILMS INTERNATIONAL

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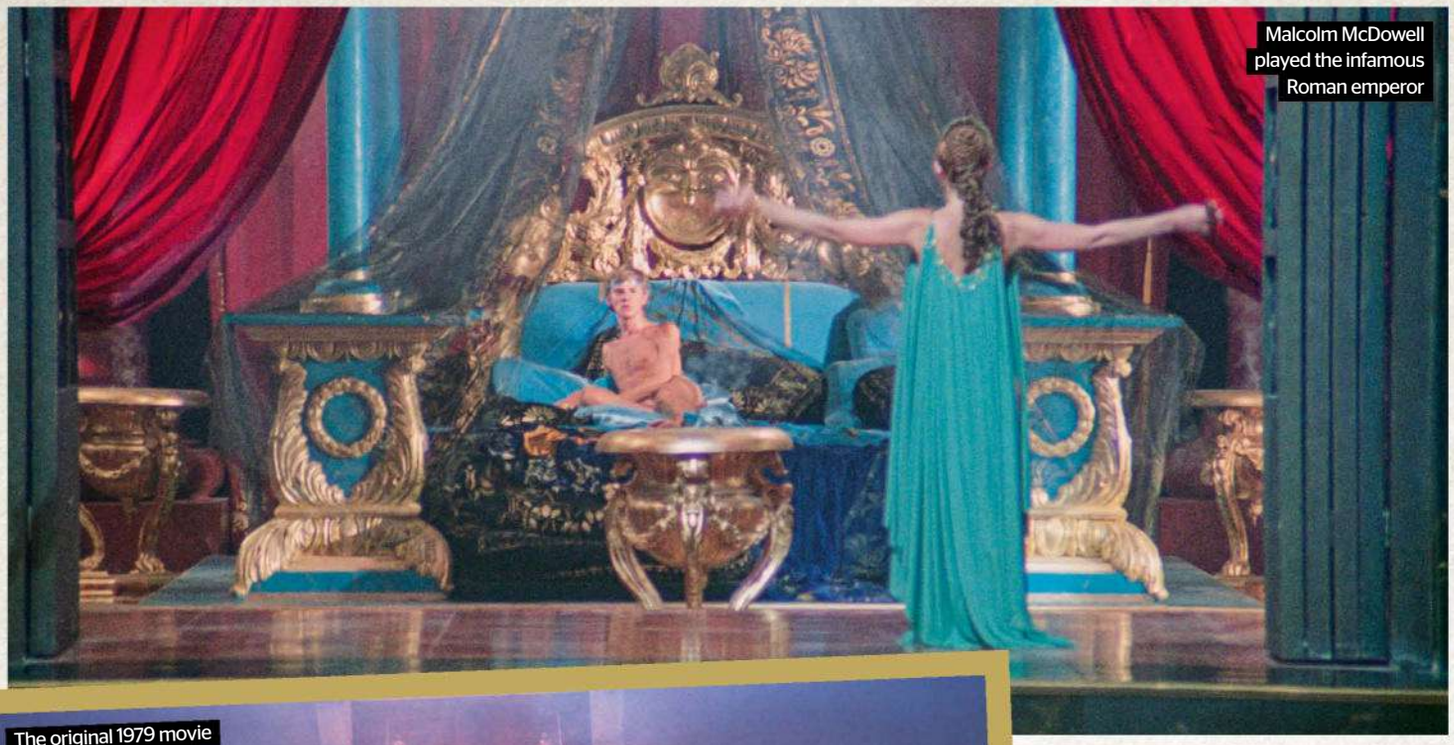
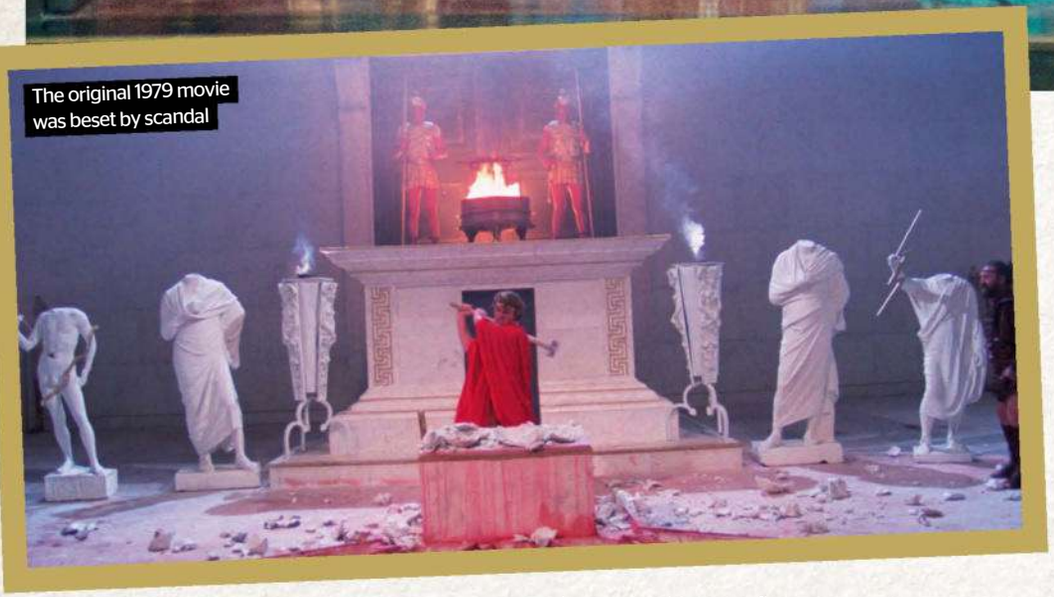


Malcolm McDowell played the infamous Roman emperor



The original 1979 movie was beset by scandal

out of the movie and replaced by just porn.'

One of the most iconic stars of the 1960s and 70s, thanks to turns in Stanley Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange* and Lindsay Anderson's *If....* and *O Lucky Man!*, McDowell's work in *Caligula* should've elevated his stardom even further. Instead, he was left devastated by Guccione's pernicious meddling. 'I was really very depressed about it. Actually, I think I went into a depression. It affected me badly. Honestly, I think it was one of the reasons I left England.' The actor can't help but also reflect on Guccione's fate. 'He was a very wealthy man. And he ended up dying in a trailer park. And so things did not go well towards the end of his life. Karma is a bitch.'

Originally titled *Gore Vidal's Caligula*, the screenwriter's intention was to create a serious drama about the life of Caligula. The Roman emperor, from AD 37 until his assassination in AD 41, he became famed for rumoured incestuous relations with his sisters, his tyrannical rule and his increasing bouts of mania. It was Vidal who first contacted McDowell about the project. 'The Roman Empire has always been a fascinating subject,' says McDowell. 'So I was very interested. And when I talked to Gore, I didn't want to play him as a madman. And I said, "People get bored watching a madman for two hours."'

While Vidal told McDowell to think of financier Guccione 'as one of the Warner Brothers', this amicable feeling didn't last. Vidal quit the project, aghast that Guccione hired Danilo Donati, the production designer who went on to make the fantastical sets for Mike Hodges' sci-fi *Flash Gordon*, to create outlandish backdrops. But Brass remained at the helm. 'Tinto was a very principled man, very strong, and wouldn't put up with any bullshit,' recalls McDowell. 'And his words to me, as we were about to do take one, the very first scene… He turned to me and said, "We do not screw *Penthouse* – or we fail." That was ringing in my ears as I started this long journey.'

> 'Huge scenes were replaced by porn. I was shell-shocked' **MALCOLM McDOWELL**

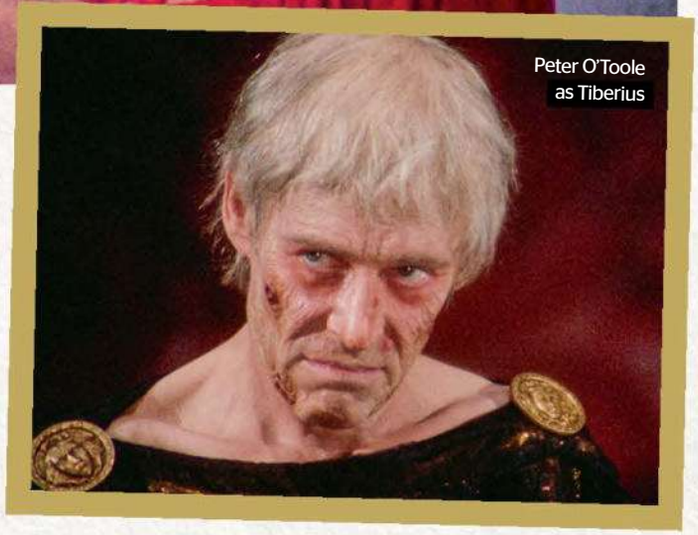
After Guccione secretly brought in *Penthouse* girls to film porn scenes on the same sets when the main shoot wrapped, McDowell was so crushed, he told his agent always to block any requests concerning *Caligula*. 'I never, ever wanted to talk about that damn film ever again.' Which rather explains why Thomas Negovan had such trouble getting in contact with him, Mirren or Brass, who is now 90 years old. 'Absolutely none of them ever got back to me,' he says, ruefully. 'The thing that I didn't know when I got the job was how terribly traumatic the experience had been for everyone involved.'

McDowell with Helen Mirren as Caesonia

Mirren's screen time in the original was cut drastically

AI technology was used in the revamp

'If this version had opened at the time, it would have been a game changer. It would have been one of the films of the year' **MALCOLM McDOWELL**


Peter O'Toole as Tiberius

An art-gallery owner and short filmmaker, Negovan had experience working with museums on archival projects. With a friend who worked for Penthouse Global Licensing, the branch of the company dealing with legacy materials, Negovan was asked to look at the raw footage of *Caligula*, untouched for years and held in a Los Angeles storage facility. 'It just started with mountains of filthy, dusty boxes,' marvels Negovan. 'It was like going into your grandfather's garage or something. They just hadn't ever opened them.'

Wading through a treasure trove of materials, Negovan discovered original camera negatives, location audio, reams of paperwork and nearly 11,000 behind-the-scenes photographs. 'My basic statement to them was, "I don't know what you have, but you have something."' Gradually, it became clear that 'something' could be a reworking of the Guccione travesty, an attempt to bring *Caligula* back to what Vidal and Brass has originally intended. 'I think that my expectation was that it would be a bit of a hodgepodge,' says Negovan. 'It might be the old version with some extra scenes put in.'

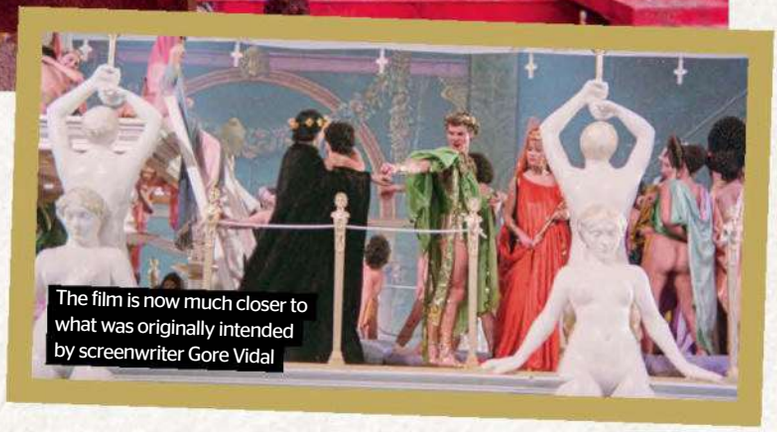
Over the next three years, 'it just completely turned into a different animal', says Negovan, who set out to painstakingly jigsaw the original *Caligula* back together, ultimately increasing the running time to almost three hours. Among other things, he was able to use advanced AI tech, notably around the poor-quality audio in scenes involving Gielgud, who plays Nerva, Caligula's friend. 'A huge rescue for us was AI,' says Negovan, who latched onto the same technology that Peter Jackson used for *The Beatles: Get Back*, his marathon look at the recording of the Fab Four's final studio album.

'We were able to separate John Gielgud from the machinery sounds. And otherwise that clanging of the motor when he's in the bath… That was the worst audio that we had. [So much so], I was like, "We're just going to

Raw footage of the film was held in an LA storage facility

John Gielgud starred as Nerva

The movie has been re-edited by filmmaker Thomas Negovan



The film is now much closer to what was originally intended by screenwriter Gore Vidal

have to put a disclaimer on the film." And by the end of the movie, that was some of the best-sounding audio. We couldn't have done it five years ago. This was a great example of technology being in service of art.'

When McDowell finally saw this new cut, he was in Newfoundland, Canada, lying in bed, watching it on his iPad. There to shoot comedy series *Son of a Critch*, it was the show's creator, Mark Critch, who had been contacted on Instagram by Negovan, and convinced McDowell to watch it. 'I was amazed – it all came flooding back,' says McDowell. 'And I was sort of vaguely stunned. I sat there in silence for quite a while thinking about what I'd seen. I immediately called Thomas to talk to him. That was the first time we spoke and we spoke for an hour and a half, two hours.'

Among other things, the film rescues Helen Mirren's performance as Caesonia, the courtesan who Caligula eventually marries. In the tampered Guccione version, Mirren's appearance was limited to just 17 minutes. Now it has been restored so she appears for almost an hour. Negovan reports that Mirren's husband, director Taylor Hackford, came to the LA premiere. 'He did jokingly confide she probably won't watch it, only for the reason that she just doesn't really like to watch her films. But he said, "I'll tell her that I saw it. I loved it. I thought it was great. And that she was great in it."'

No doubt, *Caligula: The Ultimate Cut* isn't exactly a sex-free zone, adds Negovan. 'The movie is certainly not suitable for children. It's a very erotic film regardless. Tinto had all of those elements present. But we made the decision that, OK, you can cut an orgy from 12 minutes down to five. And put seven minutes of the characters actually talking to each other. And so that's the way the globe started to shift… I mean, really, the way that we approached this movie is we pretended that the 1980 release never happened. I did not study the original film until after we were done.'

For McDowell, the erotic content still held an importance – like the moment Caligula goes to a wedding and has sex with both the bride and groom. 'That's not porn!' he remarks. 'That is who Caligula was. Ultimate power corrupts absolutely. Absolute power corrupts absolutely. And that was the beginning of him losing control. And it's a very important scene. It's all the extraneous stuff [that was awful, like] me actually looking at my pet hawk, cut away to 18 minutes of hardcore porn penetration, blah, blah. Cut back to me and a smile on my face.'

McDowell can't help but hide his delight at Negovan's work. 'I am thrilled that he did it. Thrilled that the real film is there now for everyone to see. I'm also thrilled to be able to answer the critics, who would say things like, "Why would these mainstream actors do this crap?"'

Sadly, he feels that Brass won't be able to appreciate this restoration at this point in his life. 'So he will never really know. And I think he'd be very happy with his movie because all the major sequences are in it. And they are really beautiful.'

With choral music added, *The Ultimate Cut* also stitches together non sequiturs from the original movie. 'When Caligula says to his sister at the funeral, "It's just like the dream," there's no dream. They never filmed it,' reports Negovan. 'That's why we had to make the opening credits. That nightmare that he wakes up from.' No question, it's unrecognisable from the mangled release that came out in the UK in 1980. 'If Thomas' version had opened [at the time], it would have been a game changer,' enthuses McDowell. 'It would have been absolutely one of the biggest films of the year. I bet you. Because it's very cutting edge. Even today you go, "Wow."'

McDowell himself is 'thrilled' with the new cut

CALIGULA: THE ULTIMATE CUT
OPENS IN CINEMAS IN SPRING 2024.

INHERENT VICE'S LAST SUPPER SHOT

The day after Paul Thomas Anderson's seventh movie, *Inherent Vice*, premiered at the 2014 New York Film Festival, Anderson joined festival director Kent Jones on stage to discuss the movie and its many influences. The first one mentioned was short-lived TV series *Police Squad!*, starring Leslie Nielsen as bumbling Sgt. Det. Lt. Frank Drebin. So what did 12-year-old Paul learn when his dad sat him down to it? 'You can fill the frame with crazy shit.'

Packed with dopers, hustlers, hippies, sex workers, surfers, cops and coke-snorting dentists, stoner-noir *Inherent Vice*, adapted from Thomas Pynchon's kaleidoscopic novel, is two-and-a-half hours of crazy shit, as PI Doc Sportello (Joaquin Phoenix) investigates a suitably hazy kidnapping case in Los Angeles, 1970. But perhaps the craziest shit of all is the moment when Doc snaps a picture of a bunch of hippies chowing down at a long table just as the blocking replicates Da Vinci's mural *The Last Supper*. Only with pizza.

'Things come from all places to help you,' said Anderson of his reference points, and Jesus breaking bread with the disciples one last time slots alongside nods to existential LA noirs like *Chinatown* and *The Long Goodbye*, Neil Young's experimental debut film *Journey Through the*

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Past, and, er, *The Muppets*. As a throwaway sight gag, it's perfection. But it's also, maybe, something more, just as Doc's investigating of many meandering plot strands does, perhaps, uncover political corruption on a national scale. After all, *Inherent Vice*, for all its silliness, is a deeply romantic and melancholic picture that captures the loss of the counterculture dream in the face of Vietnam, Charles Manson, Nixon, gentrification and more.

Might it be, then, that the *Last Supper* snap represents a last hurrah of all things flower power before the betrayal, just as Christ was offered up by Judas? Communion plays a vital role throughout *Inherent Vice*, with Doc and fascist cop Bigfoot (Josh Brolin) often eating together, always with Bigfoot scoffing his grub in a typically violent manner. A chocolate-covered banana or a popsicle represents his masculinity, even as Anderson scoffs at his tough-guy toxicity by watching him slurp on these phallic symbols. Finally, when Bigfoot eats Doc's joint and then munches down an entire plate of marijuana leaves, the beastly cop is perhaps issuing an apology for his behaviour and crossing over to Doc's side.

Who knows? Nothing is focused and fixed in *Inherent Vice*, a pungent, swirling fug of a movie. But, hey man, it's a groovy thought.

JAMIE GRAHAM

GOLDEN GRAHAMS

THIS MONTH

Toxic masculinity fuelled by booze: few films shake me to my core like *Wake in Fright* (1971) and *Goat* (2016)

ONE MORE...

THE BOYS 1998

Out on parole, a man returns home for booze, barbies and brutality in this Aussie drama.

When I was at university, in the early 90s, the done thing in my circle was to drink until you passed out. On special days, like the day of the Christmas ball, you'd be awakened by guys jumping on your bed and pinning you down as they poured shots in your mouth. Then you'd drink all day until you could barely clamber into your tuxedo. Which is when the partying really started. It was accepted 'fun' at the time. Now I've not touched a drop of alcohol for 15 years and I shudder at the (blurry) memories.

The trauma-as-tomfoolery world of unbridled machismo is captured unerringly well by *Wake in Fright*, in which well-spoken teacher John Grant (Gary Bond) gets stranded in dust-caked, sun-blasted Bundanyabba en route to Sydney. The Yabba is, says a cabbie, 'the best place in Australia… a friendly place', and the population of sweaty, braying men in vests pour beer down Grant's neck. 'Don't you worry, lad, drink up,' is the consolation when he loses all of his money gambling, and a series of delirious days spent under the booze-sodden wing of Doc Tydon (Donald Pleasence) culminate in Grant being taken on a night-time kangaroo hunt. It's an appalling massacre, captured by director Ted Kotcheff riding shotgun on a real hunt to shoot documentary footage.

Goat, based on Brad Land's autobiographical book, tracks 19-year-old Brad (Ben Schnetzer) as he follows his older brother Brett (Nick Jonas, excellent) to college and seeks to join the same fraternity. To be accepted, Brad and the other 'goats' must first survive the hazing of 'Hell Week', in which they're continually roughed up and humiliated and water-boarded with booze. 'Nice cute smiles, Guantánamo-style,' they're ordered as they huddle, half-naked, for a photo.

Tough watches but very much worth it (*Wake in Fright* is a masterpiece), both movies know that banter is often bullying, friendly punches leave bruises, and homoeroticism throbs between men who would punch your lights out if you made such an observation. In *Goat*, Brad's sense of masculinity is in tatters after a violent assault; the fraternity offers protection and kinship, but only if he stops being a 'pussy'. *Wake in Fright* has Grant, educated and snobby, uncorking his most primitive urges in order to be accepted. It was directed by Kotcheff long before he made *First Blood* and *Weekend at Bernie's*, and he understood what it was to be an outsider – growing up in Canada, he was marked out for having Bulgarian parents.

Unsurprisingly, many Australians complained at how this outsider represented them in *Wake in Fright*. But Kotcheff pointed out that he was not chronicling a geographical phenomenon. 'It's us, it's men,' he said, and quoted Socrates: 'Know thyself.' There's more to these films if you want it – *Wake in Fright* is soaked in the blood of colonial history; the self-proclaimed 'gentlemen' of *Goat* are tellingly privileged – but it's the alcohol and testosterone that most impact. 'We're blacking out tonight, motherfucker!' yells one frat boy as they hit a keg party. 'Water's only for washing in,' sneers a Yabba local.

I, like many men, was once flailing in such an environment. Few movies capture it so well. Which is to say, horrifically.

Editor-at-Large Jamie Graham unearths underrated classics...

See these if you liked...

FULL METAL JACKET 1987
R. Lee Ermey's drill sergeant pushes Vincent D'Onofrio's grunt past breaking point. In *Goat*, Jake Picking's pledge master is similarly odious.

ONCE WERE WARRIORS 1994
Temuera Morrison charms and terrifies in Lee Tamahori's tale of alcoholism and domestic abuse in a close-knit Maori community.

FIGHT CLUB 1999
David Fincher's punchy adaptation of Chuck Palahniuk's coruscating satire on masculinity.

BULLY 2001
A pack of bored teens conspire to murder the titular tormentor in Larry Clark's disturbing drama.

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ALAMY

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JACQUES TOURNEUR

Oh, what an atmosphere...

WHAT THE DICKENS?

Son of French director Maurice Tourneur, Jacques grew up in the movie industry. After directing a handful of films in France, he made the leap to Hollywood in 1934, only to end up stuck helming shorts for MGM and working as second-unit director on *A Tale of Two Cities* (1935), shooting the epic 'storming of the Bastille' sequence. It was there he met and befriended production manager/unit producer Val Lewton.

CHEAP THRILLS

Hired to head up RKO's new horror unit, Lewton quickly called on Tourneur's services. The three 'cheapies' they made together – *Cat People* (1942), *I Walked with a Zombie* and *The Leopard Man* (both 1943) – are masterpieces of economy and style. 'To me it's like Lennon and McCartney,' says Guillermo del Toro. 'Were [Lewton and Tourneur] both good? Yeah, they were great. But together they were better.'

MADE YOU JUMP

'When the audience recognises its own insecurity in the film, then you can show unbelievable situations and be sure that the audience will follow,' stated Tourneur. His mastery at building atmosphere and tension even birthed a now iconic (and much imitated) jump-scare technique in *Cat People*, when an expertly choreographed stalking sequence comes to a sudden end with a startling sound of brakes as a bus barrels into shot.

THE TRUTH IS OUT THERE

'I make films about the supernatural because I believe in it,' said Tourneur, explaining his affinity with horror films. Beyond that personal interest, though, the filmmaker enjoyed fantastical stories for the lyrical qualities they offered, stating that such movies paradoxically offered the chance to 'try to be a little more subtle than almost any other sort of commercial film allows'.

B-MOVIE MAVEN

'I'm a journeyman filmmaker, nothing more,' claimed the self-deprecating Tourneur. 'I make films because it is my métier; I know how to do it, and I can do a good job on pretty well everything I am given.' Sadly, while never given the chance to prove himself on an 'A' picture, Tourneur brought his poetic visual style to a wide range of popular genres, including thrillers, westerns, melodramas and swashbucklers.

ANTON VAN BEEK

KEY MOVIES

I WALKED WITH A ZOMBIE 1943

★★★★★

Tourneur's dreamlike visuals bring a hypnotic quality to this eloquent spine-tingler, inspired by *Jane Eyre*.

OUT OF THE PAST 1947

★★★★★

Perfectly paced and shot through with doomy atmosphere, this seductive noir ranks among the genre's best.

STARS IN MY CROWN 1950

★★★★☆

Hints of John Ford abound in Tourneur's atypically nostalgic and socially daring character study, his personal favourite among his films.

NIGHT OF THE DEMON 1957

★★★★☆

Not even a big rubber demon foisted on the movie by the US producer can detract from Tourneur's ominous occult thriller.

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INTERMISSION

A WRITER TAKES PAUSE TO CONSIDER...

HOW LINDSAY ANDERSON'S *IF....* PUT MY SCHOOL DAYS ON SCREEN

MATT GLASBY
@MATTGLASBY

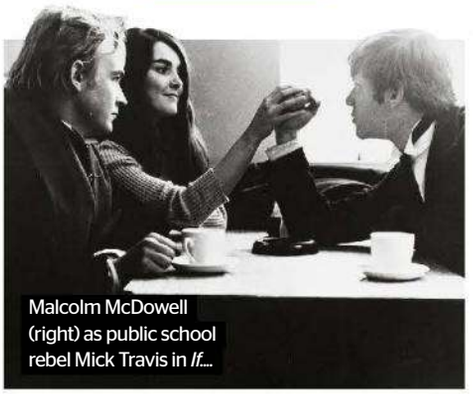
When I was growing up, the John Hughes-style American high-school movie didn't speak to me at all. In real life, I never saw the losers winning, or the shy guys getting the girl. Not least because, as I attended a single-sex private school, there weren't any girls.

But Lindsay Anderson's stirring 1968 satirical drama *If....*, about a rebellion in a fusty boys' boarding school, really struck a chord. Released at a time of political turmoil, it pitted the Crusaders, a group of idealistic pupils led by the dashing Mick Travis (Malcolm McDowell), against the establishment and its prehistoric traditions, and ended, thrillingly, in all-out war.

As an adult, I realise I'm extremely privileged to have had such an education, especially as the government helped pay for it and I'd have been eaten alive anywhere else. I had some good teachers and made some lifelong friends, but the school was hopelessly stuck in the past, its values mired in patriarchal entitlement and its pupils only recognised for what they achieved, not what they thought, or – god forbid – felt.

Anderson shot his masterpiece at his old school, Cheltenham College, using a fake script to convince them he meant no disrespect. Later, he would talk affectionately of his time there, but when it comes to skewering the system, *If....* is absolutely savage. School life is a mixture of ridiculous bureaucracy ('Ringworm? Eye disease? VD? Confirmation class?' the pupils are asked during a medical exam), pointless rules ('You don't speak to us, you're a "scum", aren't you?') and arcane practices such as fagging (an abusive system whereby the younger boys act as servants/slaves to the older prefects, or whips).

Some 30 years later we were forced to learn Latin (last spoken around 750AD) and parade around in uniform as part of the Combined Cadet Force (CCF), in training, presumably, for building another empire or fighting another world war.



Malcolm McDowell (right) as public school rebel Mick Travis in *If....*

But it wasn't just ridiculous, it was harmful. Living in such a rarefied environment left us stunted – like the foetus in a jar that Mick and his pals find – and completely unprepared for real life. Keeping the opposite sex at arm's length (literally, we had to remain a foot away from any visiting girls) meant we grew up misinformed and misogynistic. And there was such a terror of homosexuality (which is illicit but rife in the film), that out of 700 pupils only one had the courage to come out. How terribly, terribly sad.

Unlike *If....*, caning had been abolished years before, but the stench of sublimated violence still tainted everything. There was even a shooting range, FFS. Like the boys in the film, we were always jostling for supremacy – in the classroom, in the playground, on the pitch – but rather than training us to fight to the top of a dog-eat-dog world, weren't they meant to be civilising us?

> 'Like us, they're soon brought back to earth by the stupidity and brutality of the system'

I don't remember when I first saw *If....* – it feels like it's always been with me – but I do recall a video passed between my friends, along with *A Clockwork Orange* (another early McDowell classic) and other contraband. Of course, despite their pretentious proclamations, we sided with Mick, Knightly (David Wood), Wallace (Richard Warwick) and the Crusaders. Like them, we tried to lose ourselves in music (the hauntingly spiritual *Sanctus* from the *Missa Luba* features prominently in the film; we preferred Radiohead), fantasy (they play at swordfights; we acted out scenes from *Taxi Driver*) and romance. Who could forget the beautiful moment a lovelorn Bobby Philips (Rupert Webster) watches, spellbound, as Wallace performs on the parallel bars?

Like us, they're soon brought back to earth by the stupidity and brutality of the system. I remember being made to choose between music, art and drama – all of which I loved – because they weren't 'proper' subjects. A friend getting suspended for having slightly too long hair. A teacher laughing when I broke my leg playing football. I interviewed McDowell once, and, to my eternal joy, he repeated one of the film's most famous lines down the phone: 'When do we live? That's what I want to know.' When indeed?

For financial reasons, parts of *If....* were shot in black and white, mostly fantasy sequences and intimate moments exploring the characters' inner lives. But for me it was the other way around: the endless monochrome of school punctuated by bright sunbursts of colour when, all too briefly, we managed to escape. If we ever really did.

After Hours

TOTAL FILM RETROSPECTIVE

Griffin Dunne looks back on starring as the hapless hero in Martin Scorsese's exhilarating nightmare comedy...

WORDS JAMIE GRAHAM

In the 1980s, Griffin Dunne starred in two movies that opened to mixed receptions but are now considered classics. One was John Landis' horror comedy *An American Werewolf in London* (1981); the other was midnight-black screwball thriller *After Hours* (1985), directed by Martin Scorsese.

'It is now de rigueur for every horror movie to have humour and horror in the same frame, but that was considered sacrilege at the time,' says Dunne, now 68, of *An American Werewolf in London*. 'I played Jack Goodman [who's killed by a werewolf and returns as an animated corpse to warn his friend David of his hairy fate], and it was my job to be funny, despite how torn up and rotting my corpse was. Jack went through his own living hell in various degradations.'

Dunne's character in *After Hours*, Paul Hackett, has it a whole lot worse. A meek computer operator, he meets Marcy (Rosanna Arquette) in a New York coffee shop and scores her phone number. When he calls, she invites him over to her loft in SoHo, but the night rapidly descends into the date from hell. And there's no escape. As Paul desperately tries to flee, he's confronted by irate cabbies, bumbling cat burglars, crazed waitresses, punks, sadomasochists, a corpse and more, until his increasingly hostile encounters peak with a baying mob chasing him through the streets. Maybe it's because we've all had a nightmare date that the movie has gathered such a following over the years?

'I certainly did,' grins Dunne, who grew up in New York. 'You're at an age where you're really open to experience, to adventure. You know, I've met someone on the subway or in a bar, and they seem one way, and then it's like, "How do I get this person out of my apartment?" Or, "Am I going to get knifed

ALAMY, WARNER BROS.

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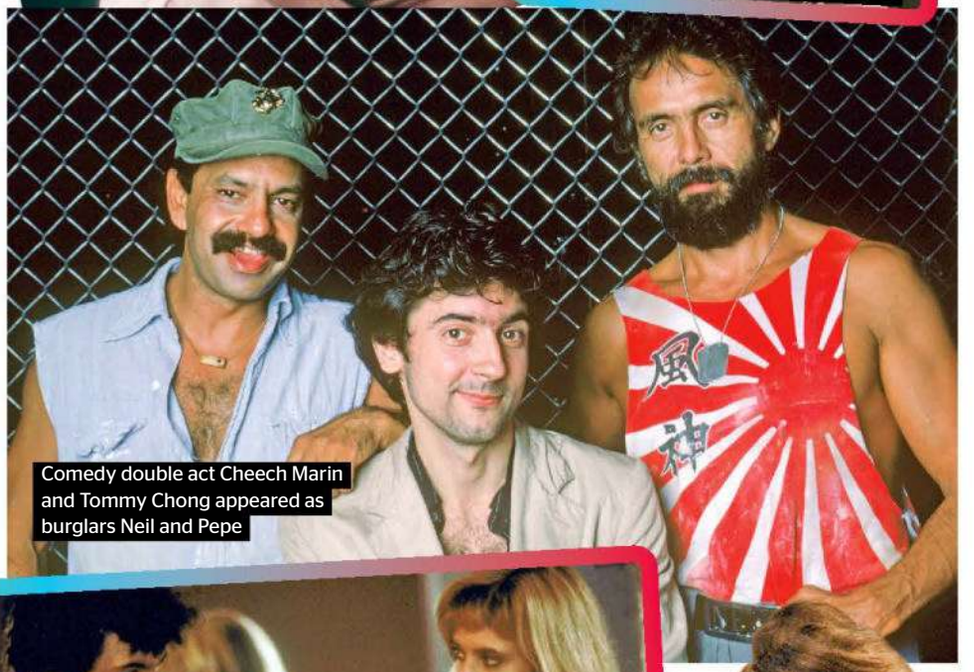
Paul meets June (Verna Bloom, left) and sculptor Kiki (Linda Fiorentino)



Comedy double act Cheech Marin and Tommy Chong appeared as burglars Neil and Pepe

Griffin Dunne as Paul Hackett with Rosanna Arquette as Marcy Franklin. Right: Teri Garr played waitress Julie

right here, in my own house?"' He laughs. 'Bad-date movies became a genre after this. And *After Hours* has become an adjective for a type of movie, or a type of night or date, that goes south.'

Scorsese's involvement came about quickly. For many months he'd been prepping *The Last Temptation of Christ*, to shoot in Israel. Aidan Quinn had lost a good deal of weight to play Jesus, Harvey Keitel had dyed his hair red for Judas. But Paramount pulled the plug just four days before the shoot was to begin – already fearful of the escalating budget and the protests of the Moral Majority, the studio lost its nerve when Philip Kaufman's epic *The Right Stuff* flopped. Determined to shoot a movie, Scorsese ploughed through numerous scripts and settled on *After Hours*, which had been written by Joe Minion at Columbia University (he got an A) and was owned by Dunne and his producing partner, Amy Robinson. Pledging to make it 'all style', Scorsese shot 16 set-ups a day (or rather, night) on a $3.5m budget; usually he did five set-ups a day and the budget of his previous movie, *The King of Comedy*, was $20m.

'He was excited to go back to his *Mean Streets* roots, and the run-and-gun he had on *Taxi Driver*,' Dunne recalls. 'He has said it brought back his passion and love for moviemaking. It was certainly exhilarating. Marty was so prepared. On the call sheet was stapled the shot list of everything we were doing that day.'

The movie didn't have an ending. They scrambled for ideas. At one point, the character of June (Verna Bloom) was going to balloon in size and have Paul climb inside her womb to escape the mob.

'Yes! I have to confess: we loved that idea,' adds Dunne. 'Verna goes, "I know where you can hide." She opens her legs and I climb inside her. She's now fecund with Paul Hackett. She ends up on the West Side Highway, and she lies down and gives birth to me. And naked, covered in placenta, I come tumbling out. So I called David Geffen, who financed the film, and I said, "We've got the ending." I explained it. He takes a beat and goes, "Have you all lost your fucking minds?"'

It was legendary English director Michael Powell, a hero of Scorsese's, who suggested the elegant, Kafka-esque climax of Paul ending up back at his work desk. Steven Spielberg and Terry Gilliam agreed. It was an inspired finish to an inspired film, which now, nearly 40 years on, is so often described as Scorsese's most underrated movie, it's not underrated at all. For Dunne, the steadily growing praise has been a mixed blessing.

'Well, having this be the second movie to have that happen, it's flattering, exhilarating and kind of frustrating that it wasn't appreciated like that at the time. And I always suspected that would be the case.' Really? 'Yeah, on both films. I always thought, "They're not getting it, quite. They're going to."'

THE NEW 4K RESTORATION OF AFTER HOURS IS NOW IN CINEMAS.

THE TF BRAIN

DYSTOPIAS

Blade Runner! *Maze Runner*! Rob Schneider! Test your gloomy-movie knowledge...

EASY

1 *The Hunger Games*' Katniss Everdeen hails from which District?
2 Which futuristic drama was withdrawn from British release at its director's request in 1973?
3 In which year is Alfonso Cuaron's *Children of Men* set? a) 2024; b) 2030; c) 2027.
4 What is Neo's real name in *The Matrix*?
5 In *RoboCop*, what does OCP stand for?

MEDIUM

1 Which 1975 sci-fi actioner was remade in 2008 with Jason Statham?
2 Which movie, according to its poster, is about 'flights of fantasy... the nightmare of reality... and creative plumbing'?
3 Name the character played by Barkhad Abdi in *Blade Runner 2049*.
4 Which actor connects *1984* (1984) with *V for Vendetta* (2006)?
5 Name the two sequels to 2014's *The Maze Runner*.

HARD

1 In which year was *Blade Runner*'s source novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* published?
2 What's the full title of the short on which George Lucas' *THX 1138* is based?
3 Complete *Alphaville*'s subtitle: *A Strange Adventure of* _?
4 Rob Schneider, Max von Sydow, Ian Dury... name the movie.
5 Who directed the 1990 big-screen adap of *The Handmaid's Tale*?

WARNER, 20TH CENTURY STUDIOS

ANSWERS: EASY – 1. District 12. 2. *A Clockwork Orange*. 3. c) 2027. 4. Thomas A. Anderson. 5. Omni Consumer Products **MEDIUM** – 1. *Death Race 2000*. 2. *Brazil*. 3. Doc Badger. 4. John Hurt. 5. *Maze Runner*. *The Scorch Trials*. *Maze Runner*. *The Death Cure* **HARD** – 1. 1968. 2. *Electronic Labyrinth THX 1138 4EB*. 3. *Lemmy Caution*. 4. *Judge Dredd* (1995). 5. Volker Schlöndorff

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NAME THE FRAME

Can you guess these eight post-apocalyptic scenes?

1

2

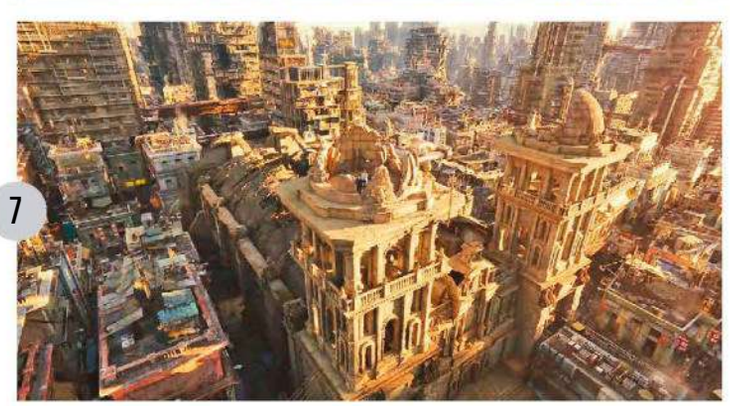
3

4

5

6

7



8

ANSWERS: 1. SNOWPIERCER. 2. THE LAST SURVIVORS. 3. ZOMBIELAND: DOUBLE TAP. 4. THE ROAD. 5. CHILDREN OF MEN. 6. NAUSICAÄ OF THE VALLEY OF THE WIND. 7. ALITA: BATTLE ANGEL. 8. STALKER

Dialogue

Mail, rants, theories etc.

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★ STAR LETTER

While I loved *Dune: Part Two*, I've got to admit I was a little disappointed there were no songs. I thought that, as with *Wonka*, although the trailer didn't feature any songs, the film would be a musical. Surely we could have had Paul Atreides singing a few verses? 'Come with me and you'll be/In a world of pure Fremen liberation/ Take a look and you'll see/I'm your messianic salvation'. Is that too much to ask?

WAVEY DAVEY, CALVERLEY

The only issue with your suggestion, Wavey, is that had there been such a tuneful, magical moment in Denis Villeneuve's film, there would have been no option but to add a sixth star to our rating system. Perhaps you could conceive a full *Dun-ka* musical? On form like that it would make any recent blockbuster look like Willy's Chocolate Experience. Wavey and everyone with a letter printed here will receive a copy of *The Holdovers*, on 4K UHD, BD and DVD from 22 April via Dazzler Media. Didn't send an address? Email it! What are you waiting for, Christmas?

GO BIG, NOT HOME

I have to disagree with the letter concerning cinemagoing [issue 348]. For me, the cinema is still the best place to experience film. The current output may not be that great (with a few exceptions), but the big screen, the incredible sound and the smaller number of distractions make it worth attending. I enjoy watching classics at the cinema as much as new releases; my local will be showing all five Indiana Jones movies over March, which I'll be attending. I've also taken my eldest, who's 19, to see

Hands up who else was disappointed *Dune: Part Two* wasn't a stealth musical?

@abdlra7man_amr
[On 2009's *Watchmen* turning 15]
'You know what, screw it: best comic-book film ever.'

Ghostbusters, *GoldenEye* and *Die Hard*. Sure, most films are available on digital two short months after their cinema release, but nothing compares to the experience.

KEITH TUDOR, ROMSEY

Indeed. And it's good to remember that there is actually more to see at the cinema than just the latest US tentpoles. And yes, we are referring to the latest *Hey Duggee* compilation. Don't knock until you've tried.

DREAM SCENARIOS

As a kid I always loved videotapes. And recently I've been having dreams where I've been watching films like *The Dark Knight*, *Avatar*, *The Hunger Games*, *Avengers: Infinity War* and even *Migration* on VHS, a format I miss so much. The tapes even have the Coming Attractions, the F.A.C.T. anti-piracy warnings, the BBFC/VSC (Video Standards Council) advice and the occasional cartoon, just as I remember watching before the Feature Presentation all those years ago. Has anyone else wished for those post-2006 films to be released on VHS? Or dreamed about them?

DARREN HENDERSON, BISHOPBRIGGS

We're envious that your dreams are so well-structured and entertaining. Whenever *Dialogue* dreams about movies, we don't even get to the first mobile-phone ad before the auditorium warps into Westfield on acid, staffed by our former secondary school teachers. Also, someone's nicked our socks.

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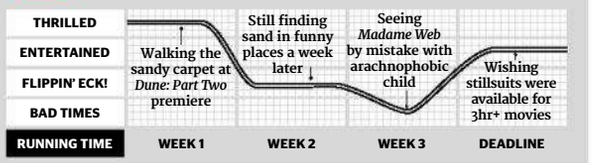

DAZZLER MEDIA. SONY. WARNER

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OFFICE SPACED

CHATTER 'GEMS' OVERHEARD IN THE *TOTAL FILM* OFFICE THIS MONTH...

* 'Wasn't until I read the *Ghostbusters* feature I realised KitKat had dropped the hyphen. Thank you, Paul Rudd!' * **'There's a roundabout named after the real-life *Shōgun* guy near my B&Q!'**

SORCERER SUPREME

I always enjoy reading your 10 of the Best page and nodding in sage agreement at your choices. But the one devoted to bridges in issue 348 had a glaring omission. I know there are a lot of bridges in a lot of movies, but how can anyone take such a list seriously that neglects to include the nail-biting highlight of William Friedkin's *Sorcerer*? No popcorn for your compiler tonight! Mind you, to be fair, I'm not sure which of the 10 films that were represented I would have removed to make way for it.

TIM GREAVES, EASTLEIGH

Well, quite. And if we'd included *Sorcerer*, how could we leave out the other film based on the same source material, *The Wages of Fear*? We couldn't turn 10 of the Best up to 11; that would be a bridge too far. Has that pun earned us our popcorn back? You're taking away our triple-dip nachos too? And the Smarties we snuck in that we thought you didn't know about? That's just cruel.

WEB OF INTRIGUE

Playing some tunes/In a maroon/
Vintage pontoon/I took my friend
June/Down the toon/To my local

Chris Jones

[On *The Gentlemen* TV series] 'It's just the movie, but slower.'

Ode-oon... Can you guess what we went to see? That's right. *Madame Web*. Should have gone to see *Dune: Part Two* instead.

TOM, VIA EMAIL

Loved unknown-superhero film *Madame Web*. Marvel, make more films of that ilk, pretty please! Like Sentry, Frog-Man, Invaders...

ADRAIN HANNA, PORTADOWN

Ah, Adrian, if only Tom and – let's be honest – the cinemagoing public could've seen the movie through your eyes. Hard to imagine we'll see anything like its ilk any time soon, but we're all for Hollywood pursuing left-field choices. (Though might be as well to lose the 'Man' from 'Frog-Man' in order to keep the budget down.)

CATHERINE THE GREAT?

I'd love to suggest an article on the best film characters. Yes, I know that this has been done before, but what I mean is, the most UNDERRATED film characters. I'll go first: Catherine Tramell in *Basic Instinct*.

CHRISTIAN FLETCHER, VIA EMAIL

Let's get the party started right here: readers, which characters deserve more love, more recognition, more sequels? As for Catherine, us hacks at *TF* Towers have always been oddly fond of seeing a writer portrayed as successful, super-smart and sexy (and who gets away with it in the end).

YOU CAN ALSO WRITE TO Total Film, 121-141 Westbourne Terrace, London, W2 6JR (postal addresses will be used for the sole purpose of sending out prizes)

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60 SECOND SCREENPLAY

SPOILER ALERT!

TF SAVES YOU THE COST OF A MOVIE EVERY MONTH. THIS ISSUE: **THE BEEKEEPER**

WORDS MATT LOOKER

FADE IN:

EXT. FIELD, MASSACHUSETTS
JASON STATHAM is an ex-member of an elite government assassin group known as The Beekeepers. He now stays hidden under the radar by working as an actual beekeeper.

LANDLADY PHYLICIA RASHAD
Oh no, my computer virus was actually a scam and they have cleared me out of all my money, which improbably added up to millions of dollars.

She kills herself. Her body is found by her daughter EMMY RAVER-LAMPMAN, who just happens to be an FBI agent.

AGENT EMMY
Why wouldn't she at least see if the police could recover the money? I mean, she knows I work for the FBI.

JASON STATHAM
It's bang out of order. The people who did this are about to get stung. Because bees.

INT: CALL CENTRE
JASON STATHAM arrives at their offices, beats everyone up and blows up the entire building. The company's douchebag boss JOSH HUTCHERSON asks JEREMY IRONS for help.

JEREMY IRONS
Even though I used to be the director of the CIA and have somehow ended up running security for you, there's nothing I can do.

JOSH HUTCHERSON
Well, I'll get the guy he just beat up to kill him. I'm sure that will work.

Henchmen destroy JASON STATHAM's beehives. He kills them all, apart from the main guy, who gets his fingers chopped off and is then tied to a truck that speeds off a bridge.

JASON STATHAM
I'm going to destroy your entire bees-ness. Business. Y'know… because bees.

JEREMY IRONS
Oh, he's a Beekeeper? Yeah, sorry, you're going to die. Beekeepers are unstoppable in this weird mythology we're creating.

INT: FBI HEADQUARTERS
AGENT EMMY realises that JASON STATHAM is responsible for all the violent attacks she has been investigating. Meanwhile, JEREMY IRONS calls in a favour.

MINNIE DRIVER CAMEO
You're having a problem with the old Beekeeper? No worries, I'll send the new Beekeeper to kill him.

JEREMY IRONS
No, don't do that – she's crazy! This makes things worse! Somehow.

The new Beekeeper fights JASON STATHAM and he eventually defeats her by throwing a jar of honey at her head. JEREMY IRONS then hires mercenaries to kill him.

JEREMY IRONS
I need you to kill the Beekeeper because, just like a bee, he will protect the hive, and bees work until they die so… yes, he is both a beekeeper and a bee in this confusing analogy.

INT: BEACH MANSION
AGENT EMMY discovers a picture of JOSH HUTCHERSON that reveals he is the son of PRESIDENT JEMMA REDGRAVE, a twist that everyone guessed 30 minutes ago. She has a party.

AGENT EMMY
Apparently there is a bee called the Queenslayer, which will kill the queen if she produces defective male offspring. Maybe he's going to kill the president at her party?

AGENT EMMY'S PARTNER
Yes, we cannot rule out the theory that this intelligent human man is actually just acting like a bee.

JASON STATHAM beats up literally everyone at the party, including 75-year-old JEREMY IRONS, until he is in a stand-off with PRESIDENT JEMMA REDGRAVE and JOSH HUTCHERSON.

PRESIDENT JEMMA REDGRAVE
I'm actually innocent in all of this. Killing me would just be confusing for the audience.

JOSH HUTCHERSON
No need! I'll kill you for no reason other than to establish myself as the one real villain.

JASON STATHAM kills him before he does and escapes out the window. AGENT EMMY has a clear chance to shoot him but respectfully lets him go despite all the carnage he has caused.

JASON STATHAM
Thank you. See you again in the sequel. *The Beekeeper 2: Bee Afraid, Bee Very Afraid. Because Bees.*

FIN

NEXT ISSUE: MADAME WEB

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